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TOUCHSTONES

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OXENDEN



TOUCHSTONES.

TOUCHSTONES;
OR,
CHRISTIAN GRACES AND CHARACTERS
TESTED.

BY THE
RIGHT REV. BISHOP OXENDEN,
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LONDON:
HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY.
HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND Co., 32 PATERNOSTER ROW.
1884.

1419 . f . 61 .



LONDON :

Printed by STRANGEWAYS & SONS,

Tower Street, Upper St, Martin's Lane, W.C.

PREFACE.

A TOUCHSTONE is a flinty substance, used for ascertaining the purity of gold and silver, and leaving a certain mark upon the metal. Hence the name given to any criterion or test.

Under this heading I venture to publish a few thoughts on some of the leading points of character and conduct belonging to a true Christian. And surely it is very desirable, where our souls' interest is concerned, that our claim to that honoured title should stand the test of God's Word ; and *that we should not rest satisfied with*

anything short of what is genuine and real.

My desire is to speak in these Chapters with fidelity, as one who must soon render up his account ; and at the same time with great tenderness and love, knowing how many defective points there are in my own character, when brought to the test of God's discriminating Word.

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TOUCHSTONES;

OR,

CHRISTIAN GRACES AND CHARACTERS TESTED.

CHAPTER I.

Q

THE TOUCHSTONE OF FAITH.

WITH this subject I begin; and truly there are few subjects which have a greater claim on our attention, and especially at the present time, when there is so much to weaken and overthrow it. There is in these days a vast amount of unbelief, showing itself not only in France, in Germany, and in Italy, but even nearer our homes—in the midst of our Country, and in the heart of our beloved Church.

To *believe* is spoken of in Scripture as essential to our salvation. It is the highest

spiritual act of a child of God ; and great is its power in our approaches to Him. ' All things (says the Saviour) whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive.' And on one notable occasion, when a heartbroken parent came to Him, having failed to receive relief from His disciples, he thus imploringly addressed the Saviour ; ' If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' To this our Lord replies, ' If thou canst *believe*, all things are possible to him that believeth '—all things, even the restoration of the poor, possessed child.

The faith required of this person was such trust and confidence in the Saviour as would lead him to put himself entirely in His hands. And this is precisely the kind of faith which He demands of *us*.

It is not the mere acknowledgment that there is a God above who has made us, and a Saviour who has redeemed us. We may be fully persuaded of this, and yet be *none the nearer* to heaven. Much more is

needed; viz., to *trust* in that Saviour, to venture everything upon Him, and to live for Him in this present world. Neither, again, is it a mere *expectation* or *hope*; but *feeling, living, and acting* under the impression of an ever-present Friend and Deliverer.

But it may be asked, 'Are we *accountable* for our faith? Is it a state of mind over which we have any control? If we believe not, is it a sin, a positive sin, or merely our misfortune?'

In answer to this question I would say, that God requires it of us—'This is His commandment (says the Apostle), that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ;' and again, 'He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.' And surely He never issues a command that we cannot obey. Where unbelief then is *wilful*, it is clearly a sin, an act of rebellion against God. And the awful effect of it will be to *close the door of mercy*, and to place us

among the lost ; for it is written, ‘ He that believeth not is condemned already.’

We occasionally—not often—meet with persons who are *open and declared unbelievers*. They even go so far as to boast of their rejection of God’s truth, as though there was a kind of manliness and courage in asserting their freedom from its restraints. Thank God, there are probably none such among my present readers ; for happily such persons are not often met with, and such a book as this would not be likely to attract them.

There is in the present day, however, a class of persons—frequently *young men*—who have acquired a little smattering of science, and pride themselves on making discoveries which seem to contradict the teaching of God’s word. They feel at liberty to play fast and loose with the most sacred truths, and take a pleasure in unsettling the minds of others.

And is not this intellectual scepticism *growing among us* ? I fear it is. It seems

to have taken the place of that cold, dry, formal assent to religious truth, with which so many contented themselves in days gone by. They were satisfied with being Christians in name ; but the truth is that there never existed in them any real faith in the Saviour, or any true love for Him. And therefore, although they professed to believe in Christ, there was an absence of all *living faith* in their hearts.

There are many who have inherited from their forefathers a kind of traditional religion, but it has been of a cold and formal type, and therefore worthless. They had no real faith : their belief was a mere fancy ; it had no life in it. This they discovered to their cost. The consequence is that they have cast off what was a mere semblance, and have allowed themselves to drift on the wave of free thought. And now they question everything, and find themselves plunged into the most miserable unbelief, either concealing *within their hearts* a secret scept-

ticism, or else unblushingly avowing themselves to be unbelievers.

It is difficult to say which state is the worst—the former state of cold indifference, which in fact amounted to hidden unbelief; or the present open avowal of semi-scepticism.

In any case, the presence of unbelief in the heart is an offence to God, and separates the soul from Him. The fact is, that a person may be outwardly well conducted; he may pass muster as a worthy member of the Church, and may even show zeal in its welfare: but if he believes not, he has no part whatever with Christ. And if he remains in this state, his case becomes utterly hopeless: it is beyond a remedy. For remember, the great indictment against a man need not be on account of any *specific* sin which he has committed, but simply because ‘he has not believed the record which God gave of his Son.’

In truth, there is no sin so great, or so *fatal*, as this. There is none, according to

God's estimate, of deeper dye. It is a sin which *man* alone can be guilty of. It cannot be laid to the charge of fallen angels. Along their gloomy coasts no tidings of redeeming love have ever echoed. Salvation has never been offered to them. No, it is especially *our* sin. It is the sin of sins, the master sin, the sin which is the root and parent of all sins ; for is it not written, ' He that believeth not the Son of God shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him ? '

Oh the misery of this state of unbelief ! A person may have been long possessed by it ; and it may have surrounded his heart with a thick crust, which the sharpest arrow of conviction cannot penetrate. Or he may have recently had his feelings injured by it. Once he followed Christ. Once his heart was warmed by the sunshine of His love. But now all is changed. There is a dark cloud which shuts Him completely out. He is filled with doubts ; and all peace is gone from him. He is like a

vessel which has no pilot to direct it, and no helm to steer it—tossed hither and thither by opposing waves.

I will now pass on to a totally different phase of unbelief, which I will characterise as *involuntary*; for it takes possession of the mind wholly against our will. There are persons who are assailed by temptations to unbelief, but it is *against their will*. The unbelief of such is hateful to them: it is their misery. They feel it to be a dead weight bearing them down; and they long to get rid of it, and to mount upward on the joyous wings of an unfettered trust.

You will bear in mind the distinction I am drawing between *wilful and deliberate* unbelief, and that which is *involuntary and unwelcome*—the unbelief which a person encourages and glories in; and the unbelief which he groans over, and from which he earnestly desires to be freed.

It has been remarked that our Lord's *enemies, the Sadducees*, doubted; and so

did His disciple, St. Thomas. But what a wide difference between the two! The doubt of the Sadducee was the cold, calculating doubt of a sceptical and unloving heart: the doubt of Thomas was an honest doubt, a doubt that arose from a certain infirmity of character, and that caused him sore uneasiness. The one was, I might almost say, the doubt of love: the other the doubt of indifference—one the doubt of a weak, but loyal servant: the other the doubt of a rebel. They both craved a sign; and whilst our Lord denied it to the one, He mercifully gave it to the other. And we have reason to believe that the *Sadducee* remained locked up in his wretched scepticism; whilst we know that the *Disciple* was brought to a full and earnest reception of the Saviour, so that he gave Him the entire allegiance of his heart, exclaiming, ‘My Lord and my God.’*

Now, I believe that there are persons

* For much of this I am indebted to the Rev. F. Robertson.

like Thomas to be met with everywhere—persons who are troubled at times with unbelieving thoughts and feelings ; and the earnest desire of their souls is, that they may be enabled to overcome them. The world has not perhaps an idea of what is passing in their minds ; and does not suspect that there is any impediment, which makes the chariot wheels of their faith at times drag heavily. But so it is. And I feel that *their* case needs to be handled with tenderness, and calls out the special sympathy of the Christian teacher. Well may his heart bleed for them, whilst they mourn over their unbelief, and would give worlds to have it removed.

I will now mention some of *the causes* of this peculiar phase of unbelief, which you will remember I have called *involuntary*, because it lingers in the heart against our will.

First, it may arise from the *particular character* of a person's mind. There are *some* minds, which are naturally cold and

suspicious. They are slow to receive any truth, whether it be of a spiritual or of a purely intellectual nature. Their bent is to weigh and measure every side of a question, and rather to look for the difficulties in it, than at once to embrace it as a whole.

Now, with such a condition of mind but little can be done, until its wretched narrowness is broken through, and its icy coldness thawed. I believe that nothing but the grace of God can remedy its defects. The heart needs to be renewed and remoulded, by the almighty Spirit of God; and the conscience so thoroughly awakened, that it shall feel its needs of just such a Saviour as the gospel reveals to us.

Another cause of this unbelief may be, that the person suffering from it has been perhaps *thrown among godless men*; for we often find to our cost that this evil disease is sadly contagious.

A young man, for instance, has been brought up religiously. He has imbibed

pious thoughts and feelings from those nearest and dearest to him. He goes into the world, and mixes with others. Bad men, as well as good, come across his path. He hears one speaking of sin with a degree of approval which at first shocks him ; but he becomes used to it. He hears another holding up religion to ridicule : this makes him feel at the moment utterly powerless to stand up in its defence ; and under the cowardly attack which is made upon him, his ground gives way. Then a third starts actual objections to revealed truth, and uses some specious argument, which cannot easily be met by him.

Now, these objections, and that argument, though spoken at random, stand by him. He cannot get rid of them. They haunt him like an evil spirit. They have broken down the barrier, and he cannot easily repair it. The bloom and freshness of his earlier feelings have been rubbed off, and his spiritual health has received a shock, *from which the recovery is often difficult.*

Thus many a one, who perhaps has entered the world with right feelings, comes out of it with his mind soiled and tainted for years to come. The arrow of scepticism has struck him, and he cannot rid himself of the smart and injury which it has inflicted on him. The seed has been sown; and alas, it bears its bitter fruit. The poison has been imbibed; and it affects his whole spiritual system. For do we not all know, that although the effects of the deadliest poison may be remedied *at the time*, if it be allowed to rest undisturbed in the system, even for a few minutes, it is fatal, and the strongest antidote cannot neutralise it?

How necessary then to guard against the first infusion of evil! And the moment we feel its power, at once to expel the intruder. For if we encourage even the little beginnings of unbelief, instead of casting them out, they will be sure to have a deadly influence over our hearts.

There is a third cause, which is, I fear, the parent of unbelief in some hearts. I mean *the indulgence of sin*—not of open sin perhaps (for many would start back with horror at the idea of such an imputation), but of some secret, hidden, heart sin, which probably the world does not detect. Nothing warps and distorts the moral symmetry of the inner man so much as this. It deteriorates the heart. And most assuredly, if sin be allowed a resting-place within us, God Himself will soon be put away, His truth will become distasteful to us, and we shall settle down into a state of cold, heartless unconcern.

And is there not yet another way in which unbelief presents itself, which is by no means uncommon? How often does a passing doubt—an occasional misgiving—come across the mind even of the earnest Christian? He sits down to read the Bible—that book which is so precious to his *soul*; and the Tempter whispers in his ear,

‘Is this really from God? Is it His message to me?’ Perhaps your heart within is able at once to answer the question. You have tasted of the preciousness of God’s word, and you feel it to be from Him.

Or you kneel down in your secret chamber, to spend a few minutes in prayer; and even whilst you are on your knees before God, the thought comes across you, ‘Does He indeed hear me? And will He answer my supplications?’ And then you happily remember how in days gone by He has heard and answered you, and revealed Himself to your soul as He does not unto the world. Well indeed if it be so with us. But it may be otherwise. The evil when begun may go on increasing, until your spiritual comfort may be completely undermined by it.

And yet God may bring good out of evil; and although these thoughts are very apt to leave their trace behind them, causing us much pain and uneasiness within, *He may allow us to be assailed by them, and may use them as ‘touchstones,’ to*

test the genuineness of our faith. Like the passing wind, they may try our very roots, but make us perhaps cling more tightly to the ground on which we are resting. And thus 'the trial of our faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth,' will be 'found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'

Here then I must close this chapter. I have mentioned four not unusual phases of that involuntary unbelief, which I have desired chiefly to bring before you, and which, if not removed, are calculated to give pain to many hearts. I leave them with you for the present. Think them over. And may the discovery of this evil within you be one step towards its removal!

In the next chapter I shall speak both of the Remedy, and of the Physician who is ever ready to apply it. Meanwhile carefully examine your own heart; and pray that Christ may graciously manifest Himself to you—removing all your doubts, and *filling you with joy and peace in believing.*

CHAPTER II.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF FAITH (*continued*).

IN the last chapter I spoke to you of *Voluntary* and *Involuntary* Unbelief—the former most hateful to God, as showing a mind in direct rebellion against Him, and effectually closing the open door of mercy; the latter distressing to the individual Christian, and calling forth our pity, rather than our indignation.

I dwelt chiefly on this *latter* phase, *Involuntary Unbelief*, and showed that it chiefly arises from one of these four causes—either from the peculiar character of a *person's mind*; or from the fact of our being thrown in with *godless persons*; or from the encouragement of some *hidden sin* within us; or, lastly, from some *temptation*, to which even a child of God is liable. And

now I am to try and help you in the expulsion of so unwelcome an intruder.

I will suppose I am speaking to one in whose heart there is at the present moment some symptom of this unbelief. It is there; and though you would give worlds to displace it, you have no power of your own to effect its removal. What is to be done?

Your obvious relief is in *Prayer*. God is the Giver of all true Faith. Entreat Him to take away that evil heart of unbelief, which, like an insidious cancer, has been long striking its roots deep within you, and to give you a believing, loving, trusting heart. Let this be the one main petition you urge with Him; not coldly or formally, but earnestly and heartily; not once or twice, but day by day; and He will not deny your request, or allow you to remain long unrelieved.

You cannot heartily love and serve God as you are. Your unbelief must be *expelled*, and a settled faith must be given

you. And remember, this is one of those 'good and perfect gifts,' which '*cometh from above.*' Faith is not a plant which springs up of its own accord in the human heart. It is an exotic, and must be transplanted there from another and a heavenly soil. Ask God for this precious gift; and by direct prayer to Him you will surely obtain, sooner or later, the comfort which you so much need. Whenever then you hear the whisperings of unbelief within you, undermining your spiritual comfort, and keeping you from God, instantly approach your heavenly Father; tell Him of your trouble, and plead with Him for its speedy removal. Say to Him, 'O Thou, who art ever ready to help Thy poor weak servant, be pleased in mercy to extricate me from these doubts, which are so miserably impeding the very life of my soul, and grant me the priceless boon of a true and living faith.'

Further, try to realise the *preciousness* and *nearness of the Saviour*. Put yourself

in His actual presence, and entreat Him to befriend you. He invites all to come to Him who are weary, and need His aid. Draw near to Him, then, and He will give you the rest which you are sighing for, showing you plainly His truth, and revealing Himself to your soul. Place yourself at His feet. Give yourself to Him heart and soul. You have perhaps hitherto followed Him, but it has been afar off. You have been afraid to take up His cross, for you have dreaded its weight. You have hesitated to yield up your affections and your will to Him ; and therefore He has stood aloof from you, and has been as a Stranger to you. But now surrender yourself wholly to Him, without reserve ; and forthwith your doubts will disperse like noxious vapours, the light of heaven will shine in upon you, and joy and peace will be your portion.

But you will say perhaps, ‘ My views concerning Christ are at present sadly defective. I need to be more fully persuaded *as to His* nature and His power to save

me. For how can I heartily embrace Him as my Saviour whilst these doubts of mine are keeping me back?' But let me ask you, Do you understand the nature of the *Sun* which shines in the heavens? Do you know all about that great luminary? Probably not; but still you draw nigh to it, and are warmed. And so it may be with Jesus, 'the Sun of Righteousness.' Oh, place yourself within His influence, and let His rays of light shine upon your soul. Remember, your Saviour loves you, and is willing (oh, how willing!) to impart unto you His most precious gifts. He feels for you, for He knows all your infirmities; and since He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour those who are tempted.

You have perhaps read many books, and some of these have rather *added* to your perplexities than *removed* them. But now you come to Him, in whom all fulness dwells—to Him in whom are hid all the *treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. You

drink at that Fountain Head, and your soul is calmed, refreshed, and satisfied.

It is said of Pascal (a holy man and one of great intellect) that when, after reading many deep books, he found them utterly powerless to give him relief, he at length came back to God, threw himself upon Him, and, shedding tears of joy, exclaimed, ‘O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—not the God of philosophers and wise men—I come to *Thee*.’

Those were the noble words of a great mind, which felt its littleness, and that God alone could reveal Himself to the heart. And does not this remind us of One greater than Pascal, who exclaimed with joy, ‘I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes?’

Yes; try to exercise your faith—the little faith you have, which can hardly be called faith, it is so mixed with unbelief—*try and exercise it.* And, like the man

whose hand was paralysed, and in the act of stretching it out received strength, so will your withered faith be strengthened by the Lord Himself. Place yourself at the Saviour's feet with a soul-felt homage; and as you trust Him He will enable you to trust Him more.

The daily *Reading of God's Word* is another important remedy. And although perhaps your mind at the time may not be disposed heartily to welcome all its statements, still read it solemnly and prayerfully, as one who longs to find the treasure it contains. Read it with humility and devoutness, and entreat God to teach you by His Holy Spirit.

Wait upon God too in the more *Public Ordinances* of His own House, remembering that a special blessing comes from *United Worship and the Preaching of God's word*; and that Faith, the Faith you long for, 'cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'

•

And what shall I say about *the Holy Communion*? Your state of partial unbelief scarcely warrants your admission to this, the highest of Christian ordinances, which demands the entire allegiance of our hearts. And yet I dare not advise you to stay away, until your doubts are removed. It would be like saying to some poor sufferer, ‘Wait till your malady is cured, and *then* place yourself under the physician’s care.’ I would rather say, ‘Come; the Lord has a remedy for earnest, seeking souls. He has a remedy for *you*. He longs to heal you, and to give you “the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Yes; if your doubts distress you, and if your heart’s desire is to have the little faith you possess strengthened, entreat the loving Saviour to accept you, and to permit you, unworthy as you are, to take the very lowest seat at His Banquet. And when there, may your Lord in His great mercy “make Himself *known* to you in the breaking of bread!”’

But you will perhaps say, 'How can I profitably use these several means of grace, seeing I have so little faith?' Are not Prayer, and Bible Reading, Public Worship, and Holy Communion, direct calls upon faith? Are they not absolutely worthless without it? It is so. But in the humble, earnest effort to use them, God will meet you with His blessing. Remember the case which I have mentioned of the man with the withered hand.

Once more, *engage in some directly Christian work.* Exercise is needful for the body. Your limbs, if unused, soon become weak and powerless. *Employ* them, and their strength returns. So it is with your poor imperfect faith. Give it some employment. Do some act for Christ in the world. Engage in some definite work for Him, and you will find light. 'He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.'

Such is my advice to any one, the

language of whose heart is at this moment, 'Lord, increase my faith.'

But let me add a word of warning, of affectionate warning, to any one who is daring to *encourage* the deadly fungus of unbelief in his soul. Do not, I beseech you, *play* with God's truth. Do not *trifle* with it. And, above all, beware how you seek to disseminate the miserable seeds of doubt, which are, alas, embedded in your own heart. It is cruel, selfishly cruel, to leaven others with that which (if you would own it) has a withering influence on your own heart, and is the very plague-spot of your life. I would rather say, 'Give up your hopeless opposition, and humble yourself before the great truths of God.' Thus your present scepticism, which leaves you without hope in life, and without an anchor to cling to in death, will be exchanged for a wiser and happier course.

I cannot now close this subject without

mentioning two or three *difficulties* which may possibly present themselves to your mind.

The first suggests itself in this shape : 'My earnest desire is to love and serve Christ; but I have so many of these doubts, that I fear He will not accept me, and that my state of mind is beyond a cure.' It is true that your condition is painful; but it is better, far better, than that of one altogether *dead and unconcerned*. Better to be feeling after Christ, though you cannot lay hold of Him as you would—better to touch even the outer hem of His garment, though you can get no nearer, than to be cold and indifferent about Him. Be assured, He knows all your difficulties, and all your weaknesses, and loves you in spite of them.

Again, a person may feel that he cannot take in the arguments which convince *others*. His mind is of such a texture that the clearest evidences do not tell upon him.

Now, the religion of Christ has its proofs for all *earnest* seekers. *One* is convinced by arguments which satisfy the *understanding*. In the case of *another*, the heavenly truths which God's word contains commend themselves to the heart, and plainly declare themselves to be from Him. For there are many who are no theologians, and yet they are quite satisfied as to the truth of the gospel, having 'the witness in themselves.' The best and strongest proofs, after all, are those which are common both to the ignorant and the learned ; viz., those which speak to the awakened conscience, and to the heart which thirsts for pardon, love, and peace. There are probably thousands of humble-minded Christians who know nothing of *proofs*, nothing of *evidences*, nothing of *arguments*; but still they believe, and are blessed.

Further, you perhaps complain of the weakness and littleness of your faith. But *it is well* if you have even the *germ* of true

faith within you, though it be sadly mixed, and almost overpowered by unbelief.

In the case of the father who came to Jesus with his afflicted child, his prayers showed a *weak*, though a *true*, faith—‘If Thou canst do anything, help us.’ A severe Master would have rejected such a prayer at once. But not so with Jesus. He accepts the tenderest *bud* of living faith, and He will assuredly accept *ours*.

Strong faith is what we should all *desire*, and *seek for*; but even in its weak state it may put forth its hand, and grasp the prize, saying, ‘Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief.’

Lastly, the difficulty of reconciling the various dealings of God with men, and of making Scripture statements entirely harmonise, is a serious stumbling-block to some. And so it must ever be with our defective understandings. Be content then with the thought that we all now see through a *glass* darkly; we know but in

part: but we shall hereafter have every mystery cleared; we shall 'know even as we are known.'

God grant that you and I may one day enjoy the unspeakable blessing of an assured and unclouded faith! 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.' Blessed is he who has a sure anchorage even in the roughest storm, finds peace in the hour of death, commits his soul calmly and trustfully to his Saviour, and wakes up to exchange his imperfect faith for sight, and his wavering hope for everlasting enjoyment in the very presence of his Lord!

CHAPTER III.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF LOVE.

FAITH worketh by love ;' and if our faith be true, it will show itself in feelings and acts of love. Do we believe in a person, so as to trust him implicitly, and take him as our guide, and follow him as our leader ? If we are persuaded of his wisdom, his integrity, and his affection towards us, then we shall also love him.

How was it with regard to our Lord ? When He came among us on His errand of love, there were many who saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. But still there was here and there a loving heart that responded to His love. They rallied round Him. They gave Him their whole hearts. They sacrificed everything for *His sake*—father and mother, children

and possessions—they left all to follow Him.

We can imagine how these His disciples hung upon His lips—how they drank in His words of wisdom—how sweet His companionship was to them—how they ran to Him in every difficulty, and poured all their sorrows into His sympathetic ear. He was unlike any other friend, for He was always accessible. He had a heart to feel for them, and power to relieve them, whenever they came to Him. He had right counsel for every case, and a remedy for every ill. Those two or three years which they spent in His society must have been years of much blessedness and peace. Every day they must have grown in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord.

Their state of mind was somewhat different from ours; and yet not altogether so. It was *different*, inasmuch as *they* saw Him, but *we* see Him not. It was *the same*, inasmuch as *they* loved Him, and *we may love Him* too. And surely to love a

seen Saviour, and to love an unseen one, equally requires grace.

You may think it was far easier for Matthew and John, for Lazarus and the Marys, to love Christ, and to follow in His footsteps, than it is for us. They could behold Him with their bodily eyes. They could read His character, which was ever open to their view. They could put themselves in His actual presence. Was it not easy then for them to love Him—far easier than for us? No, I believe not; for the same preparation of heart was needed in their case, as in ours. The same power was needed to bend their wills, and attract their affection. That saying of our Lord's was as true of them, as of ourselves, 'No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.' Indeed there is a special blessing promised to *us*, who are debarred from the privilege which the early Christians, the Apostles for instance, enjoyed; for you remember what our Lord said to Thomas, 'Because

thou hast *seen* me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have *not seen*, and yet have believed.'

Some kinds of love are natural to us. The mother loves her child, even though that child may be unlovely, and even repulsive. Yet the mother loves it with all its bodily deformity, or mental weakness. We love our relatives too : no one can take their place in our affections. We love our country : the fairest land is not to be compared with it. And if there is one spot in the wide world which is dearer to us than any other, it is the home of our birth, of our childish days, and of our riper years.

The love of these is, I say, natural to us. The dumb animals share it with us in a measure. The fierce lioness is tender over her young. The swallow in its migrations remembers its nest, and year after year returns to it. The dog follows the steps of its master, and mourns at his grave, as for a lost friend.

But the love of One who is unseen is not of nature's teaching, but of grace. It must be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us. God Himself must plant it within us. Heavenly love is the most powerful and permeating grace which can possess the soul. Even natural love is a charming and beautiful feature in the character: how much more that love which is spiritual and heaven-born. It has been said, 'The soul in which this commanding affection is lacking may now and then breathe out a rich tone, and sound its snatches of broken melody; but it is a lyre without its chief string, an organ with its central octave dumb.'*

Now, this feeling of love must be *cultivated* by us. We must ask God to take away our naturally hard and worldly heart, and to give us a new heart—tender, loving, and trustful. This blessed gift is obtained

* Martineau.

by Prayer—by direct application to God. And when obtained, it must be nurtured and kept alive by those means of grace which He has provided for us ; such as private communion with God ; meditating on the Saviour's love ; drawing near to Him, as to a friend ; meeting Him where He loves to meet us, in His House, and at His holy Table. Thus, and thus only, can we love our unseen Lord, and grow in His love day by day.

Indeed faith and love are very close companions. One cannot exist without the other. We must believe in Jesus, or we cannot love Him ; ‘ Whom having not seen we love ; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.’

The soul which so believes cannot fail to love. It is true that the eye is the ordinary door, by which love enters into us ; and in one sense it is so also *spiritually*, in the case of the true Christian, for

he loves his Lord, believing on Him, *i.e.* seeing Him with the eye of faith.

Yes, faith is the eye which pierces the clouds, and discovers Christ : it is the eye of the new creature. Faith is the hand too that lays hold of Him, the lip that embraces Him, the foot that follows Him. Many persons read in the Gospel a glowing description of Christ ; they find there a beautiful picture of Him ; and there they stop. But something more is needed, even faith. For faith believes this report, and beholds this picture ; and so lets in the love of Christ to the soul. Faith, in fact, is the parent, the groundwork, of love — the door by which alone it gains an entrance into the soul.

I have said that this feeling of love must be *cultivated*. It must be fostered and nurtured in the soul. It is a most precious possession ; but how can it be obtained ? How can this holy feeling of love be *acquired* ?

‘Love (says the Apostle) is of God.’ It comes from Him. It is a heaven-born gift. It is a seed which lies dormant within us, until it is made to grow by God Himself. It must be ‘shed abroad in our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost.’ Most clearly then it must be sought by *Prayer*. We must plead for it with the Great Giver. We must apply earnestly for it. And oh that a spark may come down from heaven, and light up a pure flame within our souls!

But in addition to *Prayer*, for the cultivation of this grace, we shall do well also to practise Holy *Meditation*. Try to realise the fact that God loves you, that Christ loves you. This will, above all things, awaken within your soul a love towards Him. ‘We love him, because he first loved us.’ Certainly we ought to love God; and we shall love Him, if our hearts are right with God. Love begets love. Love is the motive power within us. Love melts the frozen and pent-up streams, and *makes the waters flow*. Heavenly love is

the master-key which unlocks our closed hearts. In fact, let any one be fully persuaded of the exceeding loveliness of God's character, and of His special love to *us*, and this will effectually win him over, and make him give his whole heart to God. This should be our feeling—God loves me : Jesus loves me : therefore I will no longer live for sin and for the world, but for Him. 'The love of Christ constrains us.' It is a strong magnet, drawing us to Him.

But there is another important point ; namely, that if this love be genuine, it will be efficacious. What, then, will be *the effect* of the true love of God in our souls ? I might mention many most blessed effects, but I will confine myself to three.

First, if the love of God reigns supreme in our hearts, it will effectually *drive out every intruder*. It is utterly impossible that the love of God, and also the love of sin or the world, can exist in the same soul. *The sins to which we once clung will forth-*

with be expelled ; and the trifles for which we had once so greedy an appetite will lose their charm ; for God has better pleasures for our enjoyment.

Again, God's love in our hearts will be found to be the mightiest power to insure *obedience*. When our Lord invites us to make a sacrifice, and to suffer for Him, the world pronounces such a command to be intolerable. But love is prepared to obey. When He says, 'Take my yoke and my burden upon you,' Love instantly makes the yoke easy, and the burden light ; for we all know that on the back, as it were, of love a burden loses more than half its weight, and that the work which is done for love becomes a pleasure and a delight. Love welcomes hardships, and glories in tribulation. Why is it that the slave, who has gained his freedom, still works for his former master ? Why does that mother watch so tenderly over her sickly child, counting days of anxiety and nights of *watching*, as nothing ? It is in both cases

love. And so, if we love God, our great delight will be to work for Him, and to do His will.

Further, this love of God will incline us *to live very near to Him*, the life of a true disciple. Are you prepared to do this? Is it possible for any one of my readers—whether he be a person surrounded by worldliness, or one immersed in business, or a boy or girl at school—is it possible for such an one to live a holy and religious life? Thank God, it is possible; and if I could know your heart, there may be at this moment an earnest desire in you to live such a life.

Well, there is much to be done. There is a battle to be fought, and a victory to be won. But you will say, ‘I have but little strength.’ I know it is so. But what may not be accomplished by a loving heart, which, conscious of its own utter weakness, clings to the Almighty Saviour, and borrows power from Him? ‘I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth

Go forward then, dear reader, full of faith, full of trust, looking up to Him who loves you, and giving yourself to Him who is the Hope, and Strength, and Life of your Soul.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF CONVICTION.

I WISH to speak in this chapter about the nature of sin, and to point out what St. Paul calls its 'exceeding sinfulness.' And surely if this evil is actually dwelling within us, it is the height of folly to hide it from ourselves. But on the contrary it is our wisdom to discover it, and to inquire how we may rid ourselves of it. Yes, if there is an enemy within that troubles us—if there is a deadly disease which weakens and undermines our spiritual health—it is indeed a blessing if we can dislodge it from its stronghold. And further, if there is such a blessing as forgiveness with God, and if there is a way of destroying sin, *and introducing holiness in its place, it*

is well to direct our thoughts to it, and to make it the subject of our prayers.

What is sin? In the world's eye there are certain offences which it pronounces sinful. Dishonesty for instance, drunkenness, and acts of violence, it unsparingly condemns; and against these the laws of the country even protest.

But this is only a partial view to take of sin. What is it in God's sight? 'Sin (says St. John) is the transgression of the law.' Everything which is contrary to God's will, and every breach of His command, is sin. It may be open, or it may be hidden; it may rest in the heart, and never leave its hiding-place; we may intend to do a wrong thing, and never have an opportunity of doing it; but it is equally sinful in God's sight, though not in man's.

God looks upon every sin too as an offence against Him. We may, for instance, injure a fellow-creature and do him *much harm*; but the wrong is not merely

against *him*, but against *God*. Thus, when David took away Uriah's wife from him, he did not merely do a grievous injury to *Uriah*, but his offence was against *God*; so that when he was brought to see the greatness of his sin, this was his language; 'Against *thee*, *thee only* have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.' Doubtless he had wronged Uriah—grievously wronged him—he had done him an irreparable injury; but this was nothing compared with the sin which he had committed against *God*; for sin is the transgression of His law. This thought seemed to fill him with sorrow, and make him tremble before God. The same feeling was also in Joseph's mind, when temptation suddenly came in his way. He immediately exclaimed—not, How can I risk the loss of my good character, or how can I bring sorrow into the house of my master Potiphar—but 'How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?'

Look upon sin then, every sin, as a direct offence against God Himself. The

world may know nothing of it ; our fellow men, even our nearest friends, may not suspect it. We ourselves may have thought lightly of it, and it may soon have been forgotten. But still it is recorded in God's memory ; it is there ; and if not forgiven and put away, it will rise up in judgment against us.

Again, the greatness of a sin in the world's estimate in a measure depends upon its *discovery*. There are many who go on for years in acts of dishonesty, or acts of impurity, or acts of ungodliness—but a curtain is drawn over it all—it is hidden from view—and the person preserves his good name, and is perhaps highly esteemed among men. But all the while God knows his true character. He looks within, into the very depths of the heart ; and not a thought, not a desire, not a single action escapes His searching eye.

This is the God with whom we have to do, a heart-searching, a heart-trying, a

heart-knowing God. And therefore in that beautiful prayer, which we use before the reading of His Commandments, we address Him as 'Almighty God,' One, 'to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid;' and then we ask Him to 'Cleanse *the thoughts of our hearts* by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit.'

Another thing that I will mention with regard to sin is its *greatness*. The world talks of *small* sins, *trifling* sins, *pardonable* sins; but no sins are small in *His* sight. Every sin is an abomination to Him. He is 'of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.' He is a holy God, and sin is His abhorrence. His word declares that 'The wages of sin is death;' 'The soul that sinneth it shall die.' 'He will by no means clear the guilty.' It was sin that brought the Saviour into the world: it was sin that nailed Him to the cross: it was sin, one sin, that expelled our First

Parents from God's happy presence in the garden of Eden : and if we are excluded for ever from the heavenly paradise, it will be our sin that is the cause.

It has been remarked by Archdeacon Farrar, that 'it only takes one step to land us in the wrong path ; but after that one step comes another and another ; and little by little, and step by step, the wrong path may lead you as far astray as the distance between heaven and hell.' We all know that a boy by mere carelessness, by playing with gunpowder, by neglecting a sprain, by lying for five minutes on the damp grass, may lay in himself the seeds of a disease or an agony, which may end only with his life. But be sure—and this is a far more awful truth—that it is so also morally.

Beware then, oh beware, of encouraging the smallest sin, of letting in the smallest drop of that which may poison and ruin your soul, and that for ever.

But there is this remarkable thing about

sin, to which I will now call your special attention. It may, and often does, exist within us, and yet *cause us no uneasiness*. We may be unconscious of its presence, and we may be happy even, whilst it is ruining us. It is only when God by His Holy Spirit awakens us, and shows us what we really are, that we begin to be troubled. Then we see sin in its true light, and feel that it is 'exceeding sinful.'

Now then for something practical. We have seen what the nature of sin is; that it is the transgression or breaking of God's law, and an offence against God Himself; that it is great and soul-condemning; and that it is a hidden evil, of which we are often unconscious.

Now, let me implore you not to let an hour pass without calling your sins to remembrance. Let me entreat you to take a backward glance, and a very solemn review of the past. Try and refresh your memory with regard to your forgotten sins. They

may have been committed long since; but still they are lying at your door.

Confess them to God. He knows them even more accurately than we know them ourselves; but He will have us acknowledge them. Tell them out to Him one by one, and let not any be passed by.

Seek for their entire *removal*. How? There is but one remedy for us, but one Paymaster who can discharge our debt. The blood of Jesus Christ alone can cleanse us from past sin. Go to the Cross, and lay down your burden there—your heavy burden—your enormous burden—your burden which has been accumulating year after year—that burden which weighs down your soul, and keeps it from rising heavenwards. Thank God, we have in Christ ‘redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.’

Go to the Cross *daily* and *hourly*, not only to obtain pardon, but also to keep alive in your soul an abiding impression *of the deep and awful nature of sin*. Re-

member it was sin that caused your Saviour all His sorrows. It made His heart constantly bleed when upon earth. Oh then, how much evil there must have been in it ! How much poison to require such a remedy to destroy it ! Learn from this to tremble at sin. Plague, pestilence, and famine are nothing to it : these weaken the body, but sin ruins the soul.

Oh for a truer and deeper conviction of sin ! Oh that God may show it to us in all its deep colours ! Oh that our conscience may be awakened, so that we may smite upon our breasts and cry for mercy ! For unless we *feel* our sins, we shall never seek to rid ourselves of them. And though we may have obtained forgiveness through God's infinite mercy, still the smart of sin will ever remain in us, and it *ought* to remain ; for though the wound may be entirely healed, the scar remains to remind us of the past, and to keep us humble.

And now let me apply the Touchstone.

Is sin a real trouble to you? Do you hate it? Is it loathsome to your sight? Can you truly say, 'the remembrance of our sins is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable?' Have you taken your sins to the Cross, and are you ever taking them there, to have them crucified with Christ, and expelled by Him? May God help you to do so!

CHAPTER V.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF REPENTANCE.

REPENTANCE is a state of mind which God requires of those whom He receives into His favour. In our last Chapter we considered the subject of Conviction. There must be Conviction before we repent. Conviction of sin is the first waking up of the slumbering and self-satisfied soul—the first pang which leads to repentance.

But how shall I describe what real Repentance is?

It is not *mere sorrow*. It is true, there can be no repentance *without sorrow*; but there may be sorrow, great sorrow, *without repentance*. Judas, the moment he had betrayed his Lord, suffered the most intense anguish; for he felt that ‘he had betrayed the innocent blood;’ and he even went so far as to take back the bribe which

he had received, and return it to the chief priests. His however was *remorse*, and not *repentance*—it was ‘the sorrow of the world that worketh death.’ Achan too was sorry; but it was merely because his theft was detected, and brought home to him: there was however no *contrition* in his heart.

Again, repentance is not a mere *momentary feeling that we are wrong*. A person may be aroused by a striking sermon, or some remark in a religious book, and thoughts of better things may spring up in his mind. But it may be only as a passing cloud, or as the early dew, or as the crackling of thorns under a pot. In a few hours he may rock his soul to sleep again. A sudden death, for instance, may occur in a family; and this may startle us, and lead us to ask ourselves, ‘Am I ready?’ Our home is turned into a house of mourning; and this may make us very thoughtful. And yet we may be like a bar of iron heated at the forge, which is no sooner *taken out of the furnace*, and brought into

contact with the outer world, than it begins to grow cold and hard again.

But *real* repentance has certain marks, which are sure to characterise it.

First, there will be that waking up to the full *consciousness of sin*, which I have already spoken of. I have said that there is one remarkable thing about the nature of sin—that we are often unconscious of its presence within us. Yes, and a person may live on for years—yea, during a whole life—utterly unconscious of the evil within him, and without any feeling of alarm at the danger which is before him.

What a mercy then it is, when God arouses us from this deadly sleep—no matter *how*—it may be by some painful event; it may be by something which causes us great misery for a time—no matter, so long as God in His great mercy arouses us from our slumber, and stops us in our headlong course—just as a man would feel thankful, if, when walking in his sleep, he

were rudely seized and turned back, at the moment when he was on the very brink of danger. Manasseh's affliction was severe; but it was a blessing to him. The Prodigal's destitution in a far country was very painful; but without it he would not have come to himself. When Peter met the Saviour's searching eye, that look made him weep bitterly; but it was the means of saving his soul. David's sorrow was almost more than he could bear; but he looked back upon it afterwards with no little thankfulness, saying, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.'

But, secondly, in every case of True Repentance there will not only be a consciousness of sin, but also a desire and determination to *put it away*. Its presence will be hateful to us, and we shall long to be freed from it. 'I abhor myself,' said Job, 'and repent in dust and ashes.' We *shall be* grieved and humbled before God,

not so much for the punishment which we have earned, as because He is dishonoured by our sin, and our own soul is defiled by it.

It is painful to see how some persons trifle with sin, and how lightly they speak of it, as something which perhaps had better be *avoided*; but not as that which calls down God's anger, which grievously offends Him, and which made the Saviour bleed upon the Cross. It will never be so with a real penitent. He will ever speak of sin with horror, and the thought of it will grieve him to his dying hour.

Thirdly, there will be a *drawing near* to God, from whom we have been so long estranged. Thus the Prodigal arose, and went to his father. Sin separates us from God, and drives us from Him. But the true penitent feels that he needs a hiding-place and a refuge. And how encouraging for him to know that his Father is ready to receive him, and to welcome him back. He comes out to meet him. His arms are open

to welcome him. God's language is, 'Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' He has sent His Son to be our sacrifice; through Him there is acceptance, and for His sake we are sure of a gracious reception.

The case of the Penitent Thief is often quoted, and used as an encouragement to those who have deferred their repentance till a death-bed. But we should bear in mind that, although true repentance is never too late, a late repentance is seldom, very seldom, true. The thief's was certainly a late repentance; but one can hardly suppose that it was a deferred repentance: for he had probably never seen, or even heard of the Saviour, until that awful, but most blessed, meeting at the Cross.

I might describe many more characteristics of True Repentance; but I will men-

tion only one more, and that is an *earnest desire to be holy*. For this the true penitent sighs. This is what he most longs for, to be holy ; not only to be forgiven, but to serve God by a holy life. Thus in Ps. li. David not only entreats God to blot out his sins, but he further prays, ‘Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.’

And now bearing these four characteristics in mind, we shall be able to ascertain, if we desire it, whether *we* are real penitents or no. Do I feel *conscious of past guilt*, and of indwelling sin ? Is it the desire of my heart to *put away sin*, and never more to let it have dominion over me ? Have I *drawn near to God*, as a sinner, and found acceptance for my soul through the blood of Christ ? Is *holiness my aim*, and do I long to be conformed to His image ?

May God give us grace honestly to examine ourselves, and not to rest content unless we have good reason to believe that

ours is an earnest and true repentance, and that God has accepted us.

There are two little difficulties connected with this subject, to which I must briefly allude before I close this chapter.

One is, that God is often spoken of in Scripture as *repenting*. Thus in Gen. vi. it is said that 'God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and it *repented* Him that He had made man.' And in the Book of Samuel it is written that 'it *repented* the Lord that He had set up Saul to be king.' How could this be? It certainly could not mean that God regretted anything that He had done, as a man regrets when he has committed an error. God cannot repent in this sense. But it means that He sometimes changes His way of acting towards those who are unfaithful to Him; and instead of treating them with mercy, He corrects them with severity, as if He had repented of what He had before *done in their favour*. Sometimes too, on the

other hand, He is moved with compassion towards the miserable ; He hearkens to their entreaties, and does not execute the punishment which He had threatened against them. Thus it is said in the Psalms that He '*repented* according to the multitude of His mercies.' And, in Jer. xviii., God declares that 'if any nation, against whom He had pronounced His anger, should turn from their evil deeds, He would *repent* of the evil that He thought to do unto them.'

The other difficulty is this. Some are spoken of in the Gospel as *not needing repentance*. Who can they be ? In one sense we all need it ; for we have all sinned against God. Even God's people need it ; for to the end they feel themselves to be sinners. But there are some who have grown up from childhood in the fear of God, and as the sheep of His pasture. They have long devoted themselves to His blessed service. And therefore they have not the

same need of repentance as the Prodigal in the parable, or as the Publicans and open sinners.

And can we not well understand that there is a thrill of joy among the hosts of heaven when a penitent returns to God? For repentance is the first stepping-stone to salvation—the first roll in the Ladder of Life—the first tear from the eye of faith. And as the shepherd, whilst he rejoices greatly over the flock which is feeding securely under his daily care, feels even greater joy when one, that has strayed away, and has for years perhaps been given up as lost, is found, and brought home to the fold, so there is great rejoicing in heaven when a lost sinner is brought back.

God give us something of this joyous, thankful feeling, whenever a soul is brought to Christ ; and enable us to take our humble part in leading others, either by our words or by our example, into His safe and happy fold !

CHAPTER VI.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF PRAYER.

WHAT is Prayer? Is it the language of our lips? Is it the utterance of certain words upon our knees? It is this; but much more than this. For there are many who repeat words of Prayer, and yet never pray. There are many who go to church, but never draw near to God; who kneel before Him in their closets, but their hearts are far from Him. Their *lips*, it may be, have daily uttered a set of words, but their *hearts* have spoken nothing; and therefore their prayers, if such they may be called, have never entered into the ears of the Lord.

If you know anything of the life of God in your soul, you know that this is not prayer. *It was once just so with you; but*

God has taught you differently. There was a time, when a form of sound words, and a somewhat serious mind, was all you thought necessary. More than this you had heard of, but you never knew what it meant. At length came the light of God's Holy Spirit into your soul ; and then came with it new and changed views of prayer. Then you said within yourself, ' Hitherto, alas, I have never prayed at all. I have never understood what prayer meant. I used to think it was the bending of the knee, and the utterance of the lip ; words well chosen and solemnly pronounced ; but now I see my mistake. Prayer is the utterance of the heart, the speaking of the soul to God. It is a deep feeling within us of our wants, and poverty, and helplessness. It is a drawing near to God, and seeking to have our empty souls filled with His fulness.

Every person, I suppose, into whose hands this book may chance to fall, says *some sort of prayer during each day.* Pro-

bably every one kneels down, and offers up a prayer to God when he rises in the morning, and goes to bed at night. And yet, if I mistake not, you need a few kind words of advice on this subject.

Bear in mind that all God's people pray. They may be different from one another in many respects; but they all agree in this—they are a praying people. This was the description given of Saul of Tarsus, when God's grace had changed his heart, 'Behold, he prayeth.' Once he was a Jew, and gloried in his opposition to Christ and His followers. But the Lord turned him from darkness unto light; and he became an altered man, and a man of prayer.

But had he never prayed before, think you? Yes, he had repeated many a prayer. He had often knelt down in his own house, and in the temple, and holy words had passed through his lips. Like many other Jews, he had his regular times for prayer; and most likely he was very punctual in

observing them. And yet all that time he perhaps never knew what real prayer was ; he never prayed to God.

And how about ourselves ? This morning, for instance, when you knelt down by your bedside, did you pray ? Or last Sunday, when prayer was offered in church, did you join in it heartily, earnestly, and truly ; or did you sit, as if you had nothing to do with the prayers which were going up to heaven ; thinking perhaps of a thousand things, when you should have been thinking of God, and of your soul ?

But I will now give you a little affectionate advice about your Prayers.

First, it will be well *before you approach God* in prayer to stop an instant, and say to yourself, ‘Now I am going to kneel down, and make my petition to the Most High. Do I believe that He can actually hear me, and that He is able and willing to grant my requests ? Am I going to ask *according* to His will ; or have I some

selfish object in view? Am I really in earnest, and is my whole heart in the matter? Am I willing patiently and submissively to wait God's own time, and God's own way, for giving me, or denying, what I am longing for?

Such thoughts as these will prepare our minds for the work of prayer, and lead us to a better and holier way of drawing near to God's throne.

Secondly, when you are in God's presence, endeavour to *put away all worldly thoughts*. Try not to think about worldly things when you are upon your knees, but fix your thoughts on God. Endeavour to realise His presence. You are speaking to an unseen God, but to One who sees you, and can hear you; to One who knows all your wants, and is able to give you all you need. And whatever you most need, whether it be pardon for your sins, or grace to help you in serving Him, or guidance in all your difficulties, tell it out to God, and He will relieve you.

Thirdly, remember when you pray that you are speaking to a heavenly Friend, to your Father. It will help you greatly to feel that you are not addressing a stranger or one at a great distance from you, but One very near you — your Father. Try it; and may God look upon you as His dear child, and give you a Father's blessing !

Fourthly, *pray often*. Besides the regular times of morning and evening, we should get into the habit of speaking to God at other times also. Often during the day lift up your heart to God, and tell Him of your wants ; and especially in any time of trouble or difficulty.

Suppose you were walking along a difficult road, and there was some one with you who knew the way very well, and had much more strength than yourself, would you not be constantly speaking to this friend ? And when you were a little doubtful about the next step, would you *not ask him* to guide you ? Or, if you

grew tired, would you not gladly take his hand, and trust to his support?

Do so with God. He is ever by your side. Ask Him to help you, to guard you, and to strengthen you. Do not attempt to walk alone, but lean on this Almighty Friend.

Fifthly, as to *the words you should use*. You are perhaps ready to ask, Is it best to pray in my own words, or to use a prayer which I have learnt? It does not, I think, matter which, so that we pray with our whole hearts. What I would recommend is sometimes to use a Form of Prayer; and then at other times to address God in your own words; and though they may be poor and simple words, He will accept them.

There is one more important direction which I must give you. When you pray, always put up your petitions *in the Saviour's name*. Yes, you will say, I always do so. I always end my prayers with some such words as these—'For the

sake of Jesus Christ,' 'through the merits and mediation of Christ our Lord.' Is this a mere form? No; it is because we dare not come to God in our own name, for we are unworthy to do so; and therefore we come in the Saviour's name. And does He not encourage us by saying, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you?'

There is still one more direction which I ought to give you. There is something of great importance which should accompany our supplications; and that is, *Thanksgiving*. 'In all things (says the Apostle) by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God;' and again, 'Pray without ceasing; in everything *give thanks*: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' He requires of us a thankful acknowledgment of what we have received, ere He gives fresh mercies. It is the grateful heart that He loves to bless.

But do you not often find yourself

far readier to plead with God for the removal of any trial, than to praise God when that trial is removed? In a storm at sea the most careless are brought on their knees; but when the tempest is over, from how few is the voice of praise heard! And yet thanksgiving is the Christian's sweetest occupation: it savours most of heaven.

There are two inquiries which it may be well to answer. One is this—Is it right for a Christian to bring his little *personal* wants before God—matters which concern his everyday life? And further, is it permitted to bring those matters which are of a purely *temporal nature* before God? Yes, I think we may; for by so doing we give a religious aspect to all our concerns, temporal as well as spiritual; those which are connected with this world, as well as those which have a direct bearing upon eternity. For if we look into the Word of God we find no limitation whatever. ‘*In everything let your requests be made known*

unto God.' In such cases we should be careful to ask God to give, provided it be according to His will.

The other question connected with this subject is, *How does God usually grant our petitions?* Does He so palpably, and unmistakably, and immediately answer our requests, that we see at once that our prayer is heard? If we ask for guidance, does He forthwith clearly open our way? Or if we ask for strength, do we instantly feel a fresh power within us? No; it is only when we get into *the habit* of constantly committing ourselves to God—when it becomes our practice to throw ourselves on Him in good earnest—then our worrying cares leave us one by one; and God meets us with a constant outpour of blessing. It is when a person thus lives a life of prayer, constantly committing himself and his concerns to the Lord, that those words of St. John are fulfilled; 'This is the confidence that we have in him, that *if we ask anything* according to his will, he

heareth us : and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.'

My dear reader, may God pour out upon you the Spirit of Prayer ; and may He show you the sweetness and comfort of Prayer !

CHAPTER VII.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF UNWORLDLINESS.

THERE are certain ideas sometimes expressed regarding the world which are unsound and unreal, and therefore require a little adjusting. Let us apply the Touchstone, and endeavour to get at the truth.

Now, this world of ours is the place which God has chosen for our present abode. It is His world ; it is full of His works ; and there is much in it that is very lovely. Ought we not then, in a certain measure, to regard it with favour ? Surely it was never intended that we should look upon it with dislike and scorn, speaking of it with a sweeping condemnation. Our God never meant that we should. What He did mean was that we should not love *what is sinful* in it. We should not be

tied down to its bad customs, or follow its evil practices, or be drawn away by its follies. Therefore He cautions us not to love the world (1 John, ii. 15).

But this is not all. He means more than this—that we must not be so taken up even by what is *harmless* in the world as to love it to *excess*. For truly there is much in the world which, though not actually hurtful, may *become* hurtful to us—much that may steal away the heart, and shut out from it the love of God.

Take, for instance, our *Daily Occupations*. It is quite right that we should attend to them. The Christian may serve God without neglecting his worldly calling. Nay, it is a part of his duty to glorify God by an active, zealous attention to that work which has been given him to do, and to do it in a Christian manner. St. Paul bids us to be ‘fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,’ and yet at the same time not to be ‘slothful in business.’ We learn too from the Gospels, that when St. John

the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness, and crowds came to listen to his teaching, some Publicans or Taxgatherers stepped forward, and said, 'Master, what shall *we* do?' And what was his answer? Did he say to them, 'You must leave your employment, if you would be real Christians?' No; he told them to follow it, but with greater honesty and integrity: 'Exact,' he said, 'no more than that which is appointed you.' Their former sin had consisted in doing their worldly duties *ill*: their future religiousness was to consist in doing those duties *better*.

Next came some Soldiers. 'Master, what shall *we* do?' He does not say, 'You must put by your sword, and serve your country no more.' But he tells them to be more considerate, and less hasty, in the discharge of their duty: 'Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.'

But the danger is, when we allow our *worldly* occupations to take up too much of

our attention—when we set our hearts upon them, and allow them that place in our affections which ought to be given to God—when they are permitted to come first in our daily thoughts and desires, and to stand uppermost and foremost in our minds—when, in fact, the heart, which was made large enough for God, is allowed to waste itself upon the world.

Neither, again, is it the will of God that we should be debarred from loving our fellow-men that are in the world, as if He were jealous of our love being given to them; and as if we should be inclined to love *Him* the more for loving *them* the less. Surely He would have us love our Parents, our Brothers, our Sisters, our Friends, with all the intensity of the heart's affections. *This* certainly was not St. John's forbidden world.

Next, I must say a word or two about *the Pleasures and Amusements* of the world.

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Now, God never meant His people to hang down their heads, and go mourning all the day. He loves to see us cheerful and happy. There is an innocent mirth, which it is quite lawful for us to indulge in. But there are some amusements in the world which are actually sinful in themselves, or lead to sin and forgetfulness of God; and there are others too, which become sinful when they are followed with undue eagerness.

For instance, it is quite lawful for us to have Friends, and to love them, and to feel a happiness in being with them. But when we cannot do without their society, when we find it irksome to be alone, when we grow fond of being always in company; then our very friends and companions become a snare to us, and we try, by going into the world, to forget ourselves, and to escape from those thoughts which may be pressing us too closely.

I confess I tremble for the amount of *worldliness* which prevails in some families.

There is a great danger, lest pleasure and excitement should be regarded as the *one object* to be sought after—lest religion should be robbed of its true allegiance, and hearts, born for higher and better things, should be drawn down to earth, and riveted there by a chain not easily broken.

Oh, how soon—how fatally soon—we pass, imperceptibly perhaps, from things lawful to those which are doubtful—and then a step further, to those which are positively sinful! How soon does the heart, in which there was once a spark of the love of Christ, become chilled and warped by its contact with the world! How soon does the reading of light and frivolous books take the place of that precious Word, which is truth itself! And how soon is communion with God exchanged for intercourse with the world!

I do, indeed, tremble for those who are dreaming away the best portion of their lives, who are spending them in vanity and emptiness, and will one day wake up with

the miserable feeling that they have lived to no real purpose.

Did our Lord live thus, when here on earth? Did the early Christians live thus? Can you suppose for a moment that this was the life that St. Peter led, or Mary of Bethany, or Aquila and Priscilla, or St. John? Then *we* cannot live thus. No, unless we are willing to give up the Saviour, whom we have pledged ourselves to follow, and the glorious inheritance we profess to be living for.

The question is, Are we candidates for everlasting happiness? If we are, then we must live, not for this world, but for another. Our hearts and our treasure must be there.

But there is a danger into which some fall. There are some persons who imagine that they are giving up the world, when, in fact, they are merely transferring their attachment from one class of worldliness to fix it upon another. Balls and

parties are perhaps put aside when other amusements of a kindred nature, and scarcely less attractive, are indulged in. This however is not self-denial: it is still enjoying the world, though in another shape: it is turning aside from one kind of self-pleasing, that we may indulge in another.

It is a great thing to be honest with ourselves; for God is not mocked. If you really desire to carry out your baptismal promise, and to renounce the world, you must mortify your affections, which are upon the earth, and raise them by public and private prayer, and by other direct acts of faith, to things above.

In the sense then that I have mentioned, we are clearly told not to love the world. But for what reason is this warning given us? Why is this world of ours *unworthy* of our love?

First, because its spirit is directly *at variance* with God. 'Know ye not (says

the Apostle) that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God.'

What do we find, if we mix much among worldly persons? Do we not find that God is put aside? He is thrust out of His proper place. People seem to make a sort of agreement that He shall for a time be forgotten. But how sad to think that our best and truest Friend—that Friend whose presence and support we shall one day so much need—that this dear Friend should ever be forcibly excluded from our hearts, and the world with all its trifles let in! And yet so it is with the ordinary run of men.

Ought we not then, as followers of Christ, to stand aside from a thoughtless, trifling world? Is not the beaten path sometimes an unsafe path? Is not the stream that flows the smoothest sometimes nearest to the precipice? Take care lest *you are* gliding down the stream of this

world, lest you are walking in the road which hundreds walk in, and then suddenly find out that it is the way of destruction.

Another reason why we should not love the world is because *its joys are at best unsatisfying*. They are like ardent spirits to a thirsty man, which only make him thirst the more. They will never satisfy his desire, but only feed it. The worldly man, whether he is seeking after earthly pleasures, or earthly gains, is ever seeing a paradise in the distance ; but the nearer he approaches it, the more sure it is to vanish, like an optical delusion, from his sight. It is thought of in his midnight dreams, and in his waking hours ; but it is very seldom realised.

How different are those things which come from God ! There is a *substance* and reality in them, which cannot be mistaken.

There is another reason why you should

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not love the world ; and that is because it is *only temporary* ; its joys and gains are merely for a time. There is a shifting, fleeting, fading character about them. If only the greatness and blessedness of the eternal world be a real thing with you, then you will at once see how poor this world is in comparison. This world is but a Tent, spread out for our present abode : heaven is a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This world is but a passing Shadow : heaven an enduring substance. This world a Pilgrimage : heaven a home. This world is a Desert : heaven a paradise. This is a Strange Land : heaven is the place of our citizenship. This world abounds with storms : heaven is a universal calm. This world is full of changes : in heaven our lot will be for ever fixed. This world is the abode of sin, and shame, and sorrow : heaven is a scene of holiness, of glory, and of God.

Then ought we not to look upwards ?

Ought we not to set our affection on things above? We have a great work, and a perilous journey, before us. Take care that you do not loiter by the way. Hasten on. Let your motto be, 'I press toward the mark.'

It is a great mistake to suppose that we must go out of the world for safety. There is no need for us to hide ourselves in some nook and corner to escape its dangers. We are to do as much *good* as we can whilst we are here, to put our talents to the very best account, and to show plainly that, although *in* the world, we are not *of* the world; but that we have our eyes fixed on a better country, even an heavenly.

It is not, I know, easy to take a decided and unworldly course. It will cost you much. Your conduct will be carped at, and counted folly. Yes; the stream is strong, and you must stem it. The way is steep and narrow: we do not deny it. *But then how blessed to be*

following Christ ! how safe are those who are walking closely by His side !

But *this* difficulty often presents itself. Sometimes we scarcely know how to act for the best. ‘Shall I be right in doing this or that thing, or going to this or that place?’ This is a question which often comes before us ; and very perplexing it is to a really earnest mind. Let me try and help you by giving you two directions, which you may always have before you.

One is—Be very careful never to put yourself in the way of the world’s temptation. If, against your will, you are thrown into circumstance of temptation, then in that case God is ready to give you grace to come out unharmed. But never thrust yourself into such a path. For if you do this, and then expect God to keep you, you will be mistaken.

Let us take an instance. A post may be offered to you—a post of worldly advantage, but one in which it would be *difficult* to serve God faithfully. Now, in

such a case, to accept it would be to put yourself in the way of temptation, and therefore to debar yourself from God's protection, and to risk the safety of your soul ; whereas boldly to refuse it would be your duty, and in the end your happiness.

Or you may have entered upon some occupation or amusement, which you may after a while discover to be gradually deadening your heart, and unfitting you for the inward work of devotion. Then, as you value your soul, at once turn from it, and give it up. Better to displease some, and to lose caste with others—better to be despised for Christ's sake—than to forfeit the favour of God, and to miss the heavenly prize.

Again, when you find the world creeping in, at once check yourself, and be upon your guard. Even religious people, who in many respects have given up the world, who flatter themselves that they have altogether put it aside, and are beyond its reach, *may still* have very worldly thoughts

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and feelings. Oh, remember, the world may be in your heart, though not in your actions ! You may love the world, and secretly pine after it, though you have outwardly renounced it.

I have more to say on this subject, and shall therefore speak of it in the next chapter, where I shall show you that there is a *right* way of using the world.

May God help us, whilst in the world, to live near to Him ! May He be with us in our conflicts ! May He be as a Sun to cheer us, and a Shield to protect us ! And may He bring us at last to that eternal rest which He has prepared for those who truly love Him, and earnestly desire to serve Him !

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF UNWORLDLINESS

(continued).

IN the last chapter I showed you what is 'the World,' which we are charged not to love. I pointed out to you that the Christian is bound to avoid all that is actually *sinful* in the world, and also that which, though innocent in itself, *becomes sinful* when allowed to be too engrossing. He must not love it; and indeed, if the love of the Father is in him, he will not and cannot love it.

But there is a right way of treating the world, and there is a blessing to be obtained from it. It is not to be scorned and trampled upon, as if it were all evil; nor to be rejected, as altogether worthless. St. Paul tells us very differently: he

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speaks of 'using this world, as not abusing it.'

It has been said that 'the element of Fire is a gift of heaven, when we use it for the purpose of light and warmth; but it becomes a flake of hell when we let it loose over the sleeping city, or the fruitful plains. Even so the world is a blessed angel to us, if we make it our servant; but it is a malignant demon to us, if we make it our master.'*

Let us see then how we can use the world to our profit.

First, I would say, by endeavouring to fill rightly our several *relationships* in life. There was a time when our Lord put this test before His followers; 'Are you willing to leave father and mother, husband, wife, children, lands, and possessions, for My sake?' Thank God, He does not put us under this searching requirement now; though, if He did, I hope that some would

* Archdeacon Farrar.

be found, who could yield up all that is most dear to them—could empty their hearts of all their deepest affection—and in answer to the question, ‘Lovest thou me more than these?’ could say, ‘Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee;’ ‘There is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with thee.’

But, I say, our Lord in His tender mercy does not require this of us now. He allows us to love—aye, and with intense affection—those whom He has given to us, so long as they do not usurp His own place in our hearts. These are not what we are cautioned not to love. This is not the forbidden ‘world.’ But how are we to fill our relationships in the world?

Are you a Parent? Let the very image of your heavenly Father be reflected in your conduct. Bring up your children for Him. Let your love towards them be the counterpart of His love towards you.

Are you a Son or a Daughter? Let a

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spirit of dutiful obedience mark your actions. Let your great aim be to honour, to please, and to comfort your parents.

Are you in a high position? Be not over-anxious to have the pre-eminence among your fellow-men—to display your talents, or your wealth, so as to attract their admiration. But rather strive to use your influence for good; and remember that your position is like that of ‘a city which cannot be hid.’

Or are you occupying a humbler place in the world? Then, you also have a certain amount of influence, which you may exercise for Christ. You too may shine in that special walk of life which has been chosen for you.

You should use this world then, and that particular position in it which God has caused you to fill, *for Him*. And then, whether rich or poor, great or lowly, you will spread a blessing around you, and *leave a Christian mark* behind you.

In our *worldly employments* too we should endeavour to serve God. Whether we be ministers, or merchants, or tradesmen, or labourers—whatever our calling may be—we should let our Christianity be apparent in that calling. We should take our stand as servants of God. Ours should be not a mere worldly standard, but a Christian. Unswerving truthfulness, an honesty that will face the light, a rectitude which cannot be impeached, a high tone bearing the gospel impress—these should characterise all our dealings in the world. All such done as in God's sight, and with our eye ever looking for His approval, will doubtless be acceptable to Him.

Instead of regarding the hours employed in our trade, or our profession, as so much time taken away from the religious life, we should rather look upon it as the appointed sphere in which that life may display itself.

When the man, from whom the Legion

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had been expelled, asked Jesus to allow him to continue altogether with Him, our Lord in His reply sent him back to his home and his calling ; showing that in the right discharge of his worldly duties he would best glorify God. So you see that the following of a trade or profession is not only consistent with true religion, but it is often the chief sphere in which our religion shows itself.

Further, whatever we *possess* in this world, we should use it for God's glory.

Our *Time* should be employed for Him, not expended upon ourselves, not wasted or frittered away in useless pursuits, but employed for God.

Our *Food* again is not given us to pamper our appetites, but to strengthen us. We must not, as some do, live to eat and drink, but eat and drink to live. The Apostle bids us, 'Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the *glory of God.*'

Our *Money* too should be carefully expended. It may otherwise be a great snare to us, dragging us down to ruin by slow degrees. For are we not told that ‘the love of money is the root of all evil?’ And are we not warned that it is *hard* for a rich man—yea, *impossible* for one who *trusts* in riches—to enter the kingdom of heaven?

But if our money be used in a Christian way, what an important means of usefulness it may prove! How much good we may do with it! How greatly we may forward the work of God! How we may encourage those who are laying themselves out for Christ and His service! There are around us works going on—distinctly religious works—Christian works—which by our apathy we may positively check, but by our hearty interest, by our energy, and by our contributions, we may effectually promote.

Once more, we should use this world as a mere *dwelling-place*, and not as our home.

Some there are who so love the world that they have no wish to exchange it. They have made their nest here, and have no desire to leave it. Others again cling to life, not because it is dear to them ; but because the future is dark, and they fear to enter it. Thus we see them clinging to the world, though it has been anything but a joyous world to them ; aye, and clinging to it more tenaciously as years go on ; for the tree has struck its roots so deep in the ground, that it is hard to root it up. But thank God, there are others, who though they are happy enough here, are ever in a state of readiness to fly away and be at rest, to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. This world is to them only as an inn, in which they are sojourners for a while ; but their home is above : it is a strange land, through which they are passing, on their way to the 'better country.'

And now, I have two things more to

say on this subject. I have a word of caution, to put you on your guard ; and also a word of encouragement, to help you.

My *caution* is this—

Do not attempt what hundreds attempt ; do not endeavour to accomplish what cannot be accomplished ; namely, to make room in your heart for the love of the World, and also the love of the Father. They cannot exist together. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

There are numbers trying to mix up the two. But what is the consequence in such cases ? If we could look into these hearts, especially if they have experienced something of the power of grace within, we should find the religious life flagging ; its beauty and its brilliancy paling away ; the warmth of its love chilled, as it passes through the cold atmosphere of the world, having lost as it were all its power.

No, we cannot serve two masters ; we cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and yet quaff the *sweet* but poisonous cup of the

world. One or other must be put aside : one or other must gain the day.

Choose then between the two. Draw for yourself a broad line of demarcation. Draw it boldly, meekly, prayerfully, thoughtfully ; and, having drawn it, never overstep it. Hearken to the call of Him who is your truest Friend ; ‘ Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord ; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.’

And now for a word of *Encouragement*. We ask you to give up the world. This is no small demand : it will cost you much to give it up. But then we offer you more than an equivalent. And surely, since the heart is capable of loving God Himself, it is sad, very sad, to see it wasting itself on a cold, narrow, and unsatisfying world.

When we tell you then not to love the

world, we also tell you of something *better* which you *may* love. We would not wish to drive the world out of your heart, and then leave it empty. It must love something. *You cannot give a pent-up stream its choice of drying up or flowing on. It must, after a while, rush on either in a right or wrong channel. Direct it rightly, and it will flow joyously through the meadows, fertilising them in its onward course. But attempt to block up its passage, and it will soon force its way, a thing of madness and of ruin. Stop it you cannot: it must flow in one direction or another.

So it is with the heart. Let it not take its own course, unfettered and free; for then we shall have the riot of worldliness. But let us ask God to bring us under the gentle bondage of His grace. Ask Him to drive out the world, and to fill the empty void with His own presence. Ask Him to shed abroad His own love in

* See Robertson's Sermon on 1 John, ii. 15.

your heart. This will satisfy all your craving. To love God—to have our hearts filled with His love—this is our highest happiness. Then shall we have no need to go here and there with our broken cisterns ; but there will be within us ‘a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.’

CHAPTER IX.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF TRUTH.

AT different periods in the world's history there have been attempts made by one and another to ascertain what is the truth as regards man's eternal destiny. There has been an anxious yearning in many minds to have such questions as these answered—What is truth? How can I grasp it? Where is the casket that contains it? How is it to be found?

Thank God, we Christians need not make these vague inquiries. God's truth has once and for ever been revealed to us. He, who 'at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers, hath in these last days spoken by His Son.' Christ has come to this dark and *erring* world of ours, declaring 'I

am the truth.' He is the very embodiment of truth, the great Torchbearer to us on our midnight journey, the Light of the world. No doubt there are many things which we shall never know—many things too which we long to know, but our inquiries will never be satisfied—many matters of science, for instance — many hidden, locked-up mysteries, to which we would gladly find the key. And in such cases all we can do is to make our guesses. A discovery is made to-day, and a further discovery to-morrow. And yet even these may be questioned ; so that there is much that, after all, remains behind, still held back from us. We cannot reach it. There are some paths which we can never enter, and some limits which are impassable : they baffle us, and turn us back.

But happily it is not so with those higher truths which concern our salvation. God has in His mercy revealed them to us. He has given us His Holy Spirit to *'guide us into all truth ;'* *'the Spirit*

searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.' There is not an earnest inquirer, asking his way to Zion, with his face thitherward, who need fail to discover it. There is not a real seeker who will be disappointed : ' He that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth.' If we desire to serve God and live near to Him, the path is clearly marked out for us. We have our plain directory. If we have grown tired of sin, and long to be forgiven, the one remedy is declared—not many remedies, from which we may select the best, but the one heaven-devised remedy. And if to that great and all-important question, ' What must I do to be saved ? ' an answer is sought, that answer is given to us with the utmost plainness ; ' As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.' There are certain other great and leading truths, *which every thoughtful one among*

us feels to be of vast importance to his soul's comfort and his soul's safety. And on these points our souls can find no rest unless they are cleared ; but it is on these points happily that God's revelation is plain. There may be a dimness about other matters ; but here the light shines with unmistakable clearness.

And yet the truth does not *force* itself upon us. It is not equally clear to every mind. We are in the position of men with defective sight. The road is plain, so that wayfaring men, though fools, may walk therein. The path is distinctly marked out. There is light ; but it may be we have not eyes to see it. We grope as in the dark, and so miss the way.

What we need, all of us, in order to understand heavenly things, is the enlightening grace of God. He who at the first commanded the light to shine out of darkness must shine into our hearts, 'to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' There

must be a direct revelation of God to our individual souls. He must shine, not only upon the page of Scripture, but in our hearts. Christ must manifest Himself unto us, as He doth not unto the world. He must bring home His own truth to us. This is what we all need—ministers and people, learned and unlearned. We must submit ourselves to God's teaching, and learn of Him.

But do we not find that, although there is a promise from our Lord that 'the Holy Spirit shall teach us all things,' Christians differ about the truth of God, even the most earnest and devout men? The fact is, that the Holy Spirit is able, and also ready, to guide each inquirer. But He has to deal with very imperfect minds, and with very slow learners, so that the failing is on our part, not on His. Yes, so it is. And as the mariner may err, with the compass in his very hand, from not reading its bearings rightly; so the Christian will often err, mistaking the

impulse of his own mind, or the emotion of his own heart, or the dictate of his own conscience, for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And here inferior helps come to our aid. We take the Bible into our hands, knowing that it was given by inspiration of God, and that in it the Holy Spirit speaks to us. But we need further assistance to enable us to understand it rightly. The holiest man, the man of prayer, even he who is full of the Holy Ghost, needs to confer and take counsel with his brethren. He needs to be instructed, informed, and helped. It is clearly intended that it should be so. Thus Saul, when converted, received instruction from Ananias ; Apollos from Priscilla and Aquila ; and the Eunuch from Philip. And if *we* are wise, we shall thus profit by the help of others. God has not left us to ourselves, to grope our way as best we can through this difficult and dangerous world. He has given us *the teaching* and the teachers that we

need. He has banded us together, and made us helpers one of another. He makes us feel that we are brethren, united by the holiest bonds of common truth and of brotherly love.

And here it may be asked, 'In what respect may *the Church* be regarded as our teacher?' We often hear of 'the teaching of the Church.' And it is well clearly to understand whether she may be looked upon as our teacher; and if so, in what respect she teaches. Most assuredly every Church claims to be the teacher of her children; and ours undoubtedly does so. The Church is spoken of in Scripture as 'the pillar and ground of the truth.' But she does not lord it over us, bidding us receive with blind submission her own particular doctrines, as if she had a right of her own to frame them. She does not act as a stern mistress, forcing us to bend our will to hers, and our views to those which she at any time may lay down. But as a loving parent she takes us by the

hand, guiding, moulding, regulating, and balancing our judgments ; whispering to us in loving accents, ‘ This is the way, walk ye in it ; ’ ever reminding us that there is but one well-spring of truth, the Word of God, and that whatever is derived from other sources is worthless and unreal.

One word then of advice. Prize the truth, God’s truth, the truth which He has in mercy revealed to us. Be thankful that you belong to a Church which holds that truth definitely, firmly, and lovingly—a Church whose principles are not swayed by the ever-varying circumstances of time and place, but are fixed and unalterable.

But at the same time, be not satisfied with a mere reception of the doctrines which the Bible reveals to us, and which the Church has embodied in her formularies. Be not satisfied with being a sound Churchman—sound as regards the truth which you profess to hold. Rest not until *you have* received those truths into your

heart ; and, above all, until you have received Christ and His atonement as the great central truth which gives life to the soul. Doctrines, however clearly rooted in the mind, cannot save you ; but Christ can. The one is only a *skeleton*, the other is the *substance*. One is only a *code of words*, the other is a *living Person*—the Friend of your soul. It is not enough to know that the sun is shining, we should receive its *warmth* into our bosoms.

In these days, when knowledge runs to and fro, bear in mind that the best, the truest, the highest knowledge, is to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. Pray that you may know Him as your daily, hourly Companion, the Sun of your system, the Polestar as you steer your way towards the wished-for haven.

And when you sometimes think of all the doubts and controversies that are going on around us, you will do well to fall back upon the pure and simple truths of Scripture. It will be like turning from the

flickering and dancing of a meteor to the fixed stars that shine for ever, and are of a brightness that never fails. And what is of more consequence, in that day when you are called to part with life, when all else seems to be worthless and uncertain, oh, then grasp firmly the precious truth of God. Let that be the anchor of your soul, both sure and stedfast. Rest your feet securely on that solid rock, remembering that Christ and His Word are unchangeable.

What I desire for you, dear reader, and for myself, is that we may thankfully receive the truth, as taught by the Lord Himself; may love the truth and walk in the truth; till we reach that world where there will be no error, but all will be as the glow of the midday sun—where all will be light and love—‘the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.’

CHAPTER X.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF CHRISTIAN STRENGTH.

I AM afraid it must be acknowledged that there is a laxity and weakness in the Christianity of the present day. There is not that boldness, and strength, and vigour, which marked the religious life of the early followers of our Lord. Our present stature is a low one; and we do not come up to the height of those who served Christ formerly.

One cause of this is, that there is very little opposition now to the service of Christ; and where there is no opposition there is generally a lack of growth. In the days of the Apostles any one who came out from the world, and declared himself for Christ, was sure to meet with persecution. He must deny himself, and

take up his cross, if he would be His disciple. And to do this, much courage and determination were needed ; whereas in the present day, and in this country, an outward profession of religion is expected of us as a matter of course ; and a certain amount of inward religious feeling passes unobserved.

Here then is, I think, a reason why there is so large a class of half-hearted and half-devoted followers of Christ among us. The Apostles as with one voice urge us to buckle on our armour, and to put forth all our strength. They seem to say, ‘ You are in the midst of foes ; you have a great battle to fight, and a glorious victory to win. You have need of courage to make a bold stand, and of strength to overcome your spiritual enemies. Quit ye then like men : be strong.’

But Christians of the present day are not, I fear, what our Lord would have us to be. When we look around us, in our *towns*, and villages, and homes, what do

we see? Plenty of eagerness and activity, of zeal and earnestness, about worldly things; but as regards those higher things which are eternal, and which concern us far the most, there is a deadness and coldness, a shrinking back and timidity, which are very sad to think of. Many well-disposed persons are afraid to take up the cross: they dread its weight. They are ashamed to confess Christ: it would cost them too much. Here and there are a few bolder ones—a few who dare to range themselves on the Lord's side. But *they* are the *exception*.

And yet, what would you think of a soldier, who entered the army, but would have nothing to do with the active work belonging to his profession, who neglected the hours of drill, and when called upon to advance and fight, shrank back into the rear?

What would you think of a servant, who engaged himself to a master, but looked after his own gains and his own interest instead?

And are not we all Christ's soldiers and servants by profession ? Have we not once for all joined the ranks of Christ, and given a solemn vow that we will be His ? Then, ought we not to be real Christians ? Jesus says to us, ' He that is not with me is against me.' Oh, shame upon us, that we should clothe ourselves in His regimentals, and wear His livery ; and yet be on the side of His enemies ! that we should be numbered among His servants ; and yet shrink from confessing Him before men ! Manly courage and determination are needed ; for a coward cannot follow Christ. But, alas ! many of us lack the courage that is wanted. We are afraid to take the bold step, to declare ourselves for Christ, to leave the world, and follow Him, to shake off the defilements of sin, and serve a holy God.

Now, it is well to find out our fault, and to own ourselves wrong. This is a step gained. But do not let us stop there. *We should go much further.* If we feel

that we have been wanting in courage, and that ours has been but a feeble course, oh, let us wake up, and put on strength. Let us make a great effort at once to live a more *decidedly Christian life*, a more *earnest life*, a more watchful and *consistent life*, a *higher life*.

I say, a more *decidedly Christian life*. The world is unchristian ; therefore be not of the world, though living in it. ‘Come out from it, and be ye separate, saith the Lord ; and touch not the unclean thing. And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.’

To a certain extent we are forced to do as others do. But the moment we find anything drawing us away from God—anything which seems to run counter to His word and will—we should make a stand, and keep ourselves in the strait and narrow path marked out for us. We must *dare to take a Christian course*, though it

be different from the customs, and practice, and ways of the world around us ; for there are times when we must be singular, and not follow the multitude to do evil.

I do feel, that what we, who are members of the Church of England, want is to live a more decidedly Christian life, a more unworldly life, a life nearer to God, a heavenly life, walking now by faith, and not by sight, looking not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at those things which are unseen and are *eternal*, declaring plainly that we seek a better country, even a heavenly.

Let us try also to live a *more earnest* life. We are, I trust, warm in our friendships, warm in our family affections, warm in our loyalty to our Queen and Country. But is this all that is required of us ? Can it be right to be earnest and devoted towards a brother, or a friend, or towards our sovereign, but cold towards God ? And yet it seems as if we were afraid, lest *we should* give to God too much of our

love, when we know that He deserves it all—a thousand times more than we can give Him. I would say to each one of you—to you who have *never thought* on the subject—and to you also who have now and then felt a little moving of the heart towards better things, but are still wavering and undecided—aye, and to you also who have given in your allegiance to Christ—be bold, be zealous, be thorough. May the Lord give you not only grace to obey Him, but a burning zeal in His cause—not only a wish to be His, but a holy love for Him, and a desire to serve Him with an undivided heart! May He breathe life into your souls, and inspire you with a spirit of earnestness and of power!

Those persons who sometimes earnestly serve Christ, and at other times coldly turn away from Him—who are in earnest on Sundays, but lukewarm in the week—who are fervent perhaps in their expressions, but slow in doing anything for their Lord—*regular* in going to church, but

neglectful of private prayer and Bible reading—bold in conversation with good people, but keeping a cowardly silence before the careless and worldly—such persons are not real Christians, and theirs is but a poor, shallow kind of religion, unworthy of those who would be followers of Christ.

Further, let us endeavour to live a *watchful* and *consistent* life. Let us never forget—whether we are in our own quiet parishes, where every one knows us; or away from home, where those whom we meet are almost strangers to us—let us never forget that we are the professed followers of Christ, and that (wherever we may be) He marks every step we take, and every word we speak. If we would have God's presence with us, and the comfort of His blessing, we should be ever trying to serve Him *consistently*.

Be very careful with regard to the *companions* you meet. Avoid those who

speaking irreverently of Him on whom all our hopes rely. Be very careful as to the books you read, and as to the words you utter—and be especially careful to honour God, by a strict observance of His holy day; for if you chance for a time to be among those who are lax in this matter, God forbid that you should abandon our good and homely customs for theirs.

It is no easy matter to act rightly and consistently, to keep the torch alight amidst the rough and stormy atmosphere of the world, to preserve an even track amidst the many windings of your daily course. It will require your whole strength, and the constant help of God's grace, to enable you to be faithful. 'What then I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.'

Lastly, endeavour to lead a *higher* life—not only higher, as compared with the *worldly* life of those around you—not higher merely, as compared with the life which you *once lived*—but higher, as being

more like the life described to us in the Word of God, or the life of Jesus, who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, who lived for us a pure and pattern life. By a 'higher life,' I mean a more spiritual life, a more unworldly life, a life of faith, a *closer walk* with God. We need not go out of the world to lead such a life. We may live it in our homes ; we may live it amidst our daily occupations. God has called us to such a life, and He will give us grace to live watchfully and prayerfully in the world ; aye, and usefully too, a blessing to others, whilst we enjoy peace in our own souls. Oh that we could say—alas, how few *can* say—'To me to live is Christ ;' 'The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.'

But you will perhaps complain of the difficulty of such a life, and of its almost impossibility in your particular position. No, it is not impossible, though I well *know its* difficulty. 'Good thoughts (you

will say) now and then come over me ; but then comes a strong wave of worldliness, and sweeps them all away. I am powerless. The road is too narrow for me to walk in, the mountain too high for me to climb. And yet, what is the Apostle's language in Eph. vi. ? Does he not say, 'Be strong ?' Is he trifling with us when he says this ? Can he be aware of our weakness ? Yes ; but he adds three little words which are full of meaning. He knows of a secret, which he gladly divulges. He speaks of a hidden strength, an unseen strength, all ready to be given us. 'Be strong (he says) *in the Lord.*' Our strength is not in ourselves : it comes from above.

How was it that the early followers of Christ were so devoted, and did such great things for God, enduring trials, and even martyrdom, rather than deny Him ? Many of them were weak in body, and were among the insignificant of the earth. But they were 'strong' in the highest sense.

And we should be strong for Christ. We should be daring enough to stand up for our Lord, in the midst of those who love Him not we should be firm, and take the right side, never holding back for fear of others, or lest we should forfeit their good opinion.

Oh pray for heavenly strength to be given you. Draw near to God, and entreat His blessing.

To serve the Lord faithfully will require a daily effort. But do not be discouraged. He will give you all the help you need, if you apply to Him. And ever bear in mind that saying of the Apostle, 'When I am weak, then am I strong'—weak in myself, but 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY
AND REPOSE.

ACTIVITY and earnestness should certainly be a prevailing feature in the Christian character. He should be ever working for the great Master whom he serves. He should be intent on the occupation which he has in hand, doing it for the Lord, and not for man. St. Paul exhorts us to be 'active in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' And yet, at the same time, there is a calm, peaceful repose, which should also adorn our character. May we not say, then, that there is a time for *patient quietness*; and there is also a time for *activity and effort*—a time to be *up and doing*, and a time to *bear*, to *suffer*, to be *still*? For is it not in the pure, peaceful, and unruffled water that the heavens reflect most clearly their beauty?

Let us begin by inquiring when it is that this stillness becomes us.

First, when God lifts up His arm to *afflict us*. It is of little use at such times to struggle against His almighty power, to be restless and complaining when His heavy hand is laid upon us. Our wisdom is to bear with patience the burden which oppresses us, to submit cheerfully to the will of God, and to kiss the painful rod which scourges us. We should remember that our Father does not afflict His children willingly, that is, for His own pleasure, but for their profit. He loves them; and when He punishes them it is for their discipline, and to make them what He would have them to be—partakers of His holiness.

We should look at our afflictions in this light, and not let a murmur escape our lips. Our language should be, ‘It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.’

So also when we meet with *ill-treatment* from our fellow-men, it is well to

exercise the same quiet spirit of endurance. Our Lord bids us, when smitten on one cheek, to turn to the smiter the other also. We should be ready to do so. This is the spirit in which the Christian should act ; not rendering evil for evil, and violence for violence ; but, contrariwise, blessing. Of course there are occasions when it is lawful, and expedient too, to punish the offender. There are times when forbearance degenerates into cowardice, and when our quiet acceptance of injuries would only encourage the oppressor. But in most cases it is both our wisdom and our duty to exercise that Christian charity 'which beareth all things,' and 'which suffereth long, and is kind.' For this we have our Lord's example, Who said of His persecutors, 'Father, forgive them.' And the conduct of the Apostles, when they departed from the council, 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name,' shows that they had indeed 'the mind which was in Christ, their Master.'

I will mention another case in which to be still is the Christian's duty ; namely, when danger seems to be near, and nothing but God's interposition can deliver us. On such occasions it is well to 'trust, and not be afraid,' to look up with quiet confidence that God will, if He sees fit, protect us, and to be willing to place ourselves unreservedly under His sheltering care.

But more especially should this be the case, when we are clearly in the path of duty, and have some Scriptural authority for believing that God will come to our aid. We sometimes, in our folly, run here and there for help, but we do not obtain it ; we lean upon an arm of flesh, but we find no support. It was so with the unbelieving Jews. They were constantly looking to the Egyptians in the hour of their distress. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of this folly : ' Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me ; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, *that they* may add sin to sin : that walk to

go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose. Therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to *sit still*.'

They would have been much stronger, their minds would have been more undisturbed, they would have honoured God more, if they had simply trusted in His promise, and stayed themselves upon Him. And it is often our duty, in the hour of trial or of difficulty, to be still, to lie passive in God's hands, 'to hope, and quietly to wait, for the salvation of the Lord.'

And now let us take the other view. It is sometimes our wisdom, our duty, and our *strength* to bestir ourselves, and to

summon all our energy. And if we fail in doing this, we shall be acting unworthily of our character as Christians.

For instance, if there be any great and good work to be accomplished, then we sin against God by refusing to take our part. It is a sad thing to be leading a useless and inactive life, and to be a mere 'cumber of the ground.' And still more sad to be active in the pursuit of our own pleasures, or our own gains, and to work hard for the advancement of our own interests in the world, but to be doing nothing to advance the glory of God.

There is always some work to be done. The Christian may always find employment for God. Some work, however humble, may be accomplished in His name. There are millions of heathens in the world: we may do something for them. There are numbers of ungodly ones around our English homes: we may make an effort to improve their spiritual condition, and to bring *one and another* to Christ. There are

men labouring for the Lord both at home and abroad : can we not help them ? Can we not bind up some broken heart, heal some wound, or save some soul ? We may fail, it is true ; but still God will own the effort. Oh then let us try. Let us be up and doing. ‘ Why do we sit still ? ’

If the corn were ripe, it would be sinful to let it lie upon the ground, and take no steps to gather it. If numbers were dying in our streets, would not the physicians be to blame if they made no efforts to heal them ? If an enemy were to invade our country, what should we think of our soldiers if they remained at ease in their barracks ?

And so, if there is a spiritual harvest to be gathered in, if there are souls perishing, and we have the gospel remedy in our hands—if Satan is busy among us, and we have the means of opposing him—are we not to blame if we do not use them ?

But further, does it not sometimes

happen that God is dishonoured, that wicked men wax bold, and speak scornfully of that Name which is above every name? We hear religion treated with contempt, and God's people ridiculed. What then? Are we to act the coward's part, and conceal our colours? Are we to pass it by in silence? If *we* are reproached, it may be well to bear it; but if *God* is dishonoured, surely to sit still would be a disgrace to us as Christians; we should be making ourselves partakers of other men's sins.

There is one more occasion, which I must mention, when it would be a reproach to us to be inactive; namely, when a brother or sister is suffering, and we can help them.

In the Parable, spoken by our Lord, of the man who 'fell among thieves,' He describes the sufferer lying helpless by the roadside. And one and another sees *him*, but passes by with unconcern. At

length a traveller comes, and not only looks upon him with a pitying eye, but does all in his power to help him in his distress. And here is a lesson for us. We should relieve the needy, comfort the sorrowful, and exercise a brother's spirit even towards a stranger. We should never remain still, if by any effort of ours we can do an act of kindness and of love.

Let us then ask God, when He would have us to 'sit still,' and when to step forward and exert ourselves. Let us be ready either to be quiet and trustful, or to be up and doing.

There are two Scripture characters that we shall do well to copy—Martha's and Mary's. For there is something to be learnt from both. Martha, though she erred in being 'cumbered about much serving,' was actively engaged in caring for the Saviour. She felt it to be an honour to have such a Guest under her roof; and therefore she spared no *pains* to bid Him welcome.

So let us also spend and be spent for, Christ. Let us employ all our energy, and use every means, to advance His glory. Above all, let us take care that, not as to outward things merely, but as to our hearts within, we be ever in a state of readiness for our Lord's reception ; so that when He knocks at the door we may be prepared to admit Him, and He may be willing to take up His abode within us, to sup with us, and we with Him.

And let us also be like Mary, in her quiet calmness and fervent love. Her position of lowliness, and her willingness to be taught, were as welcome to Christ—aye, and more welcome—than her Sister's activity in His service. Let us often 'sit still' at our Lord's feet, and there learn those blessed lessons which He alone can teach us.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF HUMILITY.

WE should bear in mind, when speaking of Humility, that there is a distinction to be made between *natural* and *spiritual* Humility—between a lowly, meek, and retiring character, which is inborn with some of us, and that which is of God's planting and nurture in a renewed heart.

Certainly some are more naturally humble than others—more naturally so. Still, in all who are not under the influence of the Holy Spirit, pride rears its head in some shape or other. There will be either the pride of station, or the pride of learning, or pride in dress, or, which is perhaps the worst of all, the pride of humility. And it will work its way even into our

religion, if we are not watchful. All these are so many branches of this lofty, but corrupt, tree—so many symptoms of our diseased nature.

Our First Parents fell by pride ; and when the Son of God came to recover us, He did it by humbling Himself. And never was there such an instance of deep humility. ‘ Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor.’ ‘ Though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be *equal with God*,’ yet for our sakes ‘ he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant ; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’ He did indeed stoop low to save us. He left heaven with all its glories, and came into this sinful world. He laid aside for a time His greatness, and took upon Him our poor suffering nature, that He might pay with His own blood the debt, the *mighty* debt, which we owed to God.

Here then is our great Pattern of humility ; and we, His followers, must be like Him ; for does He not say to us, ‘ Learn of me—be humble like me—for I am meek and lowly of heart ? ’

Let us then now apply the Touchstone to our Humility, and put ourselves to the test. What is genuine humility ?

First, a humble Christian will feel that he owes everything to God’s grace and love. This was St. Paul’s feeling : ‘ By the grace of God I am what I am.’ ‘ To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given.’ No one can be said to be really humble, unless he is fully persuaded that he has no merit whatever of his own. When any one feels himself to be vile and sinful, and is convinced that he deserves nothing but death eternal, then how wonderful and glorious does the love of God appear in providing salvation for him ! Now, can *you* feel this ? Do your head and heart go along

with me whilst I am thus speaking? Can you say, 'Thank God for having taught me this. I see it clearly. I am nothing; and infinite mercy alone can save me from what I so richly deserve?'

I am certain of this—that it is only the humble who can feel the value of a Saviour, and who will cordially and thankfully accept His offers of mercy. One of the first things therefore that the gospel of Christ does for us is to humble us; to show us what we are, and what we deserve; to strip us of all our false coverings; and to place Christ before us as the only refuge for penitent sinners.

Well indeed is it if *your* heart has been thus humbled, so that you feel inclined to lie low at the feet of Jesus, and to cling to His precious cross for safety. I need not ask whether Christ is dear to *you*. He must be; for now that you are enabled to lay hold of Him by faith, you would not for the whole world exchange *your treasure*. You may be poor; but

you can hardly call it poverty if you possess Christ. You may have trials and sorrows; but how light is every one of them, now that you can feel you have a dear Friend by your side, who can turn all your sorrows into joys!

It is indeed good to have our hearts thus humbled by the Lord, that we may welcome Him as our complete and effectual Deliverer.

But, secondly, a humble Christian is one who not only considers *himself* nothing, but is willing to be *thought so by others*. There is a vast difference between knowing our own faults, and being willing that others should know them. It is very mortifying to be accounted nothing in the eyes of our fellow-men. Now, the really humble man is content to bear this. He has no wish to be more highly esteemed than he deserves; in fact, the flattery of his brethren is distasteful to him.

And yet how utterly contrary is this

to our natural feelings! The *Drunkard* would not wish his neighbours to know that he drinks; he would conceal it if he could. The *Dishonest* man would wish to appear honest before others. The *Sabbath-breaker* would rather that his minister should not know that he stays away from church.

And why all this desire at concealment? It is because people are anxious to keep up a character before their fellow-creatures, although they may have lost it with Him who knows all. The truth is, they 'love the praise of men more than the praise of God.'

What a dangerous snare this is! To be thought well of by our brethren, and to stand high in their opinion, is too eagerly sought after by most of us. We have need not only to fight against the fear of man, but also, and still more, against the love and esteem of man. The esteem of good men is well, as far as it goes; but *it is clearly* wrong to be always craving

after it. We should rather feel that anything like fulsome praise would be hurtful to us ; and on that account we should shrink from it, and try to put it from us.

It is hard, I know, to bring ourselves to this. To pray that we may become low in our own eyes needs *some* grace ; but to pray that we may be content to be lowered in the eyes of those around us, needs *a large amount* of grace. Suppose you were to be informed that one, who stood high for his religious attainments, had expressed an unfavourable opinion of you, would not this be very displeasing to flesh and blood ? But I am inclined to think that a true Christian, though he would feel a little nettled at the time, would be able to thank God for anything which keeps down his pride, and sets him in his proper place. And is not the day soon coming when we shall be taken off the false heights which we often stand upon, and be brought to *our true level*—when all the esteem of

others shall vanish and pass away like smoke; and we shall be just what God finds us to be, neither more nor less?

A third way in which a really humble Christian shows himself is by having *a high opinion of others*. St. Paul says, 'In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than himself;' 'in honour preferring one another.'

Whenever you see a person who appears to take every opportunity of crying down his neighbour, mark that for a proud man; and be sure that he does it in order to exalt himself. And on the other hand, whenever you see any one anxious to hide his brother's failings, unwilling to expose his little defects, and you will generally find that that is a humble man, and one who deeply feels the many faults of his own character.

How often too it happens, that when we begin to know and feel a little on *religious* subjects, the great enemy tries

to puff us up. He tempts us to speak uncharitably of those about us, to complain that this person is worldly, and that person is inconsistent; and in fact almost to think that no one is right but ourselves. For Satan had much rather that we should busy ourselves with other hearts than with our own.

Fourthly, a humble Christian is *teachable*. He is conscious that he knows nothing yet as he ought to know, and that he has much, very much, yet to learn. Such a person will read his Bible with profit, seeking to become wiser in the ways of God. The hours too which he spends in the house of God will be profitable hours; for he will be eager to feed upon the bread which cometh down from heaven, and to drink of the fountain of the water of life. The proud man will be quite satisfied with what he already knows, whilst the humble man will long to know more of God, and to love Him more.

Fifthly, a humble Christian is unwilling to *thrust himself forward*. He will not be like the Pharisees whom we read of, who loved greetings in the market, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi; nor like haughty Jehu, who called to Jehoshaphat and said, 'Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.' On the contrary, he will wish to avoid observation as much as possible. If he gives money away in charity he will do it as quietly as he can, according to our Saviour's rule, 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.' If he prays, he will not wish all the world to know it. If he comes to the house of God, he will go quietly to his place, and there he will pour out his heart before the Lord; for he comes not here to be seen of men, but to offer up his unworthy prayers to the Father of Mercies, and to listen to His message of love. Or, if he talks on religious subjects, he will say as little as may be about himself; and *if compelled* to speak of himself, it will not

be to show what a good Christian he is, but rather to acknowledge how unworthy he is, and to display the riches of God's grace in the salvation of one so utterly undeserving.

After all, it is easy to *describe* a humble person, but it is rare to *find* one. Some persons who are not religious may have a humble manner; and the hypocrite too may display a great outward show of humility; for, alas, a seeming humbleness in the outward conduct may all the while cover a very proud mind; but this is not Christian humility. What we are now speaking of is heart-lowliness; and this is only to be found in that heart which is renewed by the Spirit of God. It does not belong to the old nature, but to the new; and therefore the Christian is exhorted to put it on, as something which he never wore before. 'Put on (says St. Paul), as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, humbleness of

mind ;' and again, another Apostle says, 'Be clothed with humility.'

What a lovely thing is true Christian humility ! Our Saviour, as we have seen, possessed it in all its purity ; and the more we become like Him, the more will it adorn our character. If you wish to grow in grace, seek to be humble ; for it is written, 'He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.' The proud heart is puffed up ; and like the inn at Bethlehem, there is no room for the meek and lowly Saviour there : but the humble heart receives Him joyfully. Jesus delights to dwell in such hearts, and to fill them with His fulness.

'Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy : I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.' And just as the showers of rain slide off from the lofty hills, and rest in the valleys below, so it is the humble and *lowly* in heart that receive the largest

supplies of grace, and bear the most abundant fruit.

Then make it a subject of earnest prayer to God that you may possess this humility—that you may daily become more humble. And to this end, ask Him to stifle every proud thought as it rises up within you, and to bend you very low in the dust. Think much of Jesus, the meek and lowly Saviour. Put yourself often in His presence. Seek His spirit, the spirit of real humility. Put self aside as much as possible; for I believe that true humility consists, not so much in thinking *meanly* of ourselves, as in not thinking of ourselves *at all*.

It was said of Moses, that when He came down from the mount, where he had been with God, there was upon his countenance an unusual glory. And so will there be on ours—not an outward glory, but an inward and heavenly brightness. We cannot be in our Lord's presence with-

out bringing away something of His lovely character.

But remember, it is further said of Moses, that 'he wist not that the skin of his face shone': he was not conscious of his own glory. May you and I enjoy such a close intercourse with God, that we may shine with an unwonted brilliancy, whilst we are all the while ignorant of that brilliancy ourselves !

And we may be sure of this, that if we possess true humility now, we shall carry it with us to heaven: its stamp will be indelibly marked upon us. There we shall have it in perfection. The inhabitants of that world have no pride. The very angels cover their feet in the presence of God. They veil their faces, and abase themselves continually before Him. And we, if through God's infinite mercy we reach that holy place, though we shall then be freed from every sin, yet shall fall down before Him that sitteth upon the throne, and worship *Him that liveth for ever, and shall cast*

our crowns before the throne, never uttering one boastful word of our own worthiness, but for ever saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and honour, and glory, and blessing.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF HOLINESS.

HOLINESS is the great end of all true religion. It is the unfailing mark by which God's people are known everywhere ; it is 'the spot of His children ;' the one unmistakable feature which distinguishes His family ; the highest step which can be attained in the Christian life.

It is of course important that we should have a sound and clear view of doctrine. The awakening of our souls is also important, and the consciousness that we need a Saviour. But such knowledge and such feelings are worthless, if they lead not onward to holiness of heart and life.

But let us clearly understand what we *mean by Holiness.*

It is not a mere *outward ornament* of the Christian character, something put on for the gaze and admiration of men. It is true that it must be outward, but not merely so. A person may act religiously. He may take a high tone from grounds of expediency, or because he may chance to be thrown among men of rectitude; and yet there may not be a spark of real spiritual holiness in him. Lift up the outer covering, and perhaps you will find a miserable blank within. Holiness is a grace which belongs to the inner life. The heart, the affections, the desires, must all be holy. The heart within must be pure, or the waters which flow from it will fail to be pure also.

It is easy enough to clothe oneself in the garb of holiness, to have a righteous deportment, to have religious words upon our lips, to use religious phrases in our common talk, and even to show some interest in forwarding the outworks of *Christ's kingdom*. But this may be only

tinsel, which makes a glitter; whereas the precious ore must be there, deep in the heart, running through the whole man.

Again, holiness is not *a sudden acquirement*; it is *gradual and progressive* in its nature. There is often a great mistake on this point. There are some persons who, when they first wake up to the necessity and blessedness of a religious life, seem to expect that there is a swift and royal road, by which the highest spiritual state may be reached at a bound. It is true that a person's conversion may be sudden. He may in an instant be aroused from a long life of indifference, and from that moment become a new and altered character. He may suddenly wake up to the feeling that he has hitherto lived in vain. He may at once see the misery of sin, and may long to be delivered from its hateful bondage. He may forthwith set his face heavenward. But there is no such thing as a sudden *leap from a state of sin to a state of holi-*

ness. It must needs be a gradual work, not of a day, but of a life. Our sinful nature, which has grown up with us, must be subdued and overcome, and we must be moulded into God's image. This sin must be put away, and that evil habit conquered. The right hand has to be cut off, and the right eye plucked out ; and these are no easy operations. We must fight and struggle ; we must contend with self, as well as with our great spiritual foe. And this battle will perhaps be going on to the very last. But, thank God, there is no uncertainty about the *issue* : the victory is ours, if only we are in earnest ; we shall be sure to conquer in His strength.

Such is Holiness. Truly it is the crowning grace of the Christian life, the unfailing result of God's real work in the soul, the topstone of that spiritual building which is of His own structure.

And now there is a very important

inquiry for every earnest person ; ‘How can this state of holiness, this higher and purer life, be attained ?’ Is it beyond our reach ? Is it something ideal, which cannot be grasped by ordinary Christians ? No ; it may be acquired by every one of us. But how ?

First, bear in mind that it is *the work of God Himself*, the blessed work of His Holy Spirit. In passing over some of the wild commons of this country, if you were suddenly to come upon a field of corn, or a cultivated garden of herbs, you would know that these cannot be the natural product of the soil. You would be sure that the cultivator’s spade, and the sower’s practised arm, must have been there.

And so, wherever we find Holiness we may be equally sure that it is not natural to the soil of the human heart. It has been planted there by the heavenly Husbandman ; and there has been a work, and perhaps a long and difficult work, of *cultivation within*. The soil has been turned

up, the seed has been sown, and the dew has descended from an unseen hand. Remember then that God only, by the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit, can make us holy.

Secondly, though the work of Holiness is God's work in the heart, we must *work with Him*. Prayerful, earnest, persevering efforts are needed on our part. We must deny ourselves, and take up our cross. We must make war against sin, and be upon our guard against its intrusions. We must not only pray, 'Lead us not into temptation;' but we must be ever on our watch, and carefully close up every avenue by which it may enter. Our life must be an unerring endeavour to be holy as God is holy.

Thirdly, since God works *by means*, we must *thankfully employ them*. Now, one great mean of our sanctification is *the Word of God*. 'Sanctify them (said our Lord) through thy truth: thy word

is truth.' He has given us His word, 'that we may grow thereby.' The Bible not only teaches us how to serve God, but also feeds our souls, and strengthens us for His service. There is a transforming power in it. It not only speaks to us of God's glory and beauty, but when it is brought home to us we are changed into the same image from glory to glory. The devout, reverent, and thoughtful reading of Holy Scripture brings us into acquaintance and harmony with God, and fills our souls with love towards Him. And I ask, have not our hearts sometimes burnt within us, while He has talked with us by the way, and while He has opened to us the Scriptures?

God has also given us *Prayer*, by which we draw near to Him, and hold intercourse with Him. Prayer is the great secret in every stage of the Christian life, and especially as we approach the higher steps in our course. And he who is much in prayer *is in a fair way to become a holy person.*

His sails are being filled with the favouring breeze, which wafts him towards the desired haven.

Times of *retirement* too are essential to the Christian, if he would live near to God. Our blessed Lord, who was so much with others, often sought retirement. He needed to hold communion with His Father above, and tasted of its sweetness. And if *we* would possess anything of that calm peace and repose ourselves, we must act as He did, who rose up a great while before day, and departed into a solitary place and prayed—every spot being to us as the house of God, and every occasion a consecrated hour.

Well is it for us if we know the blessedness of thus putting ourselves often in God's immediate presence. There is so much in the world to drag us down—so much to chill and ruffle us—so much to engross our thoughts, and chain them to this earth—there is so much to call us away from what is high and holy, that it is abso-

lutely essential to our growth in grace to withdraw ourselves from time to time from our worldly pursuits and worldly companions, and to hold communion with our Lord; to lay our souls as it were in His bosom, and to hide ourselves in Him. For it is by personal applications to the Saviour that we get fresh supplies of grace and strength for growth in the spiritual life.

But there is a *Special Ordinance*, which our Lord has Himself ordained for the spiritual nurture of His children, in which the soul of the earnest believer is brought near to Christ, and is purified, strengthened, and refreshed by Him. Go to that heavenly Feast with a humble, believing, loving heart, and you will be strengthened for your onward journey, and your walk will be close with God.

There are now two questions which I should like to consider before closing this *chapter*.

One is, *where* should our Holiness show itself? Not merely in the House of God, nor in the actual exercises of religion, nor in the company of godly persons; but in our every-day life, in our transactions with the world, in our intercourse with ordinary men.

But there is one place in which it should specially show itself—in *our Homes*, in our *Family Circles*. There is nowhere that the Christian's true character is better tested than in his own household. There can be nothing put on there. All know each other too intimately for any deception. Outside religion may pass with the outside world, but it will miserably break down inside the Home. All hypocrisy will fail there: reality alone will make itself felt. Personal Holiness will be ever diffusing itself, whether found in Husband or Wife, Parent or Child, Master or Servant. It is like the perfume in the right hand, which betrayeth itself: the whole house is filled with the odour of the ointment.

What the playground is to the schoolboy the home is to the man. They are the truest tests of character.

The other question which I wish to notice is this: 'Will our state of holiness be ever perfect?'

God's work in the renewed soul is a perfect work. There is no incompleteness or defect in the Spirit's power, no stint on His part. But alas He has fallen hearts to work upon, and therefore there will ever be a falling short; we shall never reach perfection here. He bids us to be holy, as He is holy; to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect; and He gives us all the aid we need. But *we* are for ever failing, ever dragging after us a body of sin, ever aiming it may be, but always coming short, never fully reaching the mark we so long to attain. And well indeed is it if even the desire has been kindled within us. Well is it if we can truly say, 'I am earnestly pressing towards the mark,' though

there will ever be something higher and beyond, a prize which these hands of ours are too feeble to grasp.

No, we shall never be perfectly or completely holy here. We shall always need the blood of sprinkling. Our look must ever be towards the cross, and our cry to the very last, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

Perfect holiness is reserved for another state. In heaven all will be complete. We shall then bid adieu to sin, and that for ever : it will find no entrance into those high courts. Heaven will be a holy place ; for it is the presence-chamber of God Himself, and the dwelling-place of His people. And if *we* are there, washed from all our sins in the blood of the Lamb, and perfect through His comeliness, our hearts and feelings will be all in blessed accord with that sinless, heavenly throng.

Be ever trying then to rise higher. Let each step be a step onward. Let your *motto* be, 'A little further from sin,

a little nearer to God ;' until you reach a calmer and a purer region, unswayed by the eddies and currents of this lower world, and where the presence of Jesus Himself is realised in all its fulness.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

THE Bible, when referring to the Christian course, usually speaks of it as something that calls forth all our energy and earnestness. It is described as a *Race*, a *Battle*, a *Struggle*, a *Contest*. And yet, at other times, the language of Holy Scripture is somewhat different; for eternal life is set before us as a *gift*, a free gift, purchased for us at the cost of Christ's atoning blood, and made over to every true believer who is willing to accept it. In one passage St. Paul seems to combine these two opposite ideas, when he says, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and do of his own good pleasure.' From this we learn that in one sense salvation is to be

received as an unmerited boon, but in another sense as something which can only be obtained by effort.

The fact is this—that *on the part of God* heaven is a gift, an undeserved gift ; a gift which no one can claim as a right ; a purchased possession, made over to us by one who loves us, and won for us by Him who died that we might live. But *on our part* great exertion is needed to overcome our evil nature—great watchfulness, lest we miss the path which leads to heaven—a constant putting off the sins of the flesh, and a putting on of the new man, ‘which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.’ Hence our Lord says, ‘*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate ; for many shall seek (or wish) to enter in and shall not be able.’ ‘The kingdom of heaven suffereth *violence*, and the *violent* (or earnest) take it by force.’

Truly the Christian’s is no easy life. He has to contend with *Self* at every *stage* of his course—self-indulgence, self-

exaltation, self-dependence. He has to fight against some dominant passion, which is for ever striving for the ascendancy. He has constantly to be keeping under some hydra-headed sin, the sin which most easily besets him.

And here is the great difficulty of the Christian's course. It is not one or two special efforts which we have to make ; but it is a life-effort, a continued conflict, and not a thing accomplished in a moment.

I ask you, Is it an easy thing to shake off habits of long standing, which have become a second nature to you ? Is it easy to bid farewell to sins which have for years been your close companions ; to root up that which has embedded itself deep in the soil ? Does it not need much self-denial, much effort, much painful self-crucifixion ? Were it not for the Saviour's promise, ' My grace is sufficient for thee,' would not some of us be disposed to give up all in despair ?

Then too we have *the Tempter* ever trying to obtain the mastery over us, using

every opportunity to snatch us, if possible, out of the Saviour's hands. Against him there is a constant, daily warfare, a ceaseless contest. For 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.'

And *the World* is ranged against us also, whispering in our ear, 'Why give yourself so much anxiety and effort? Why toil so unremittingly for an unseen prize? When I have pleasures to offer you now, why seek those which are to come?' And yet there is something within, I trust, which tells you that you have chosen the better part—something which says, 'Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.'

Thus we have three great enemies to contend with—one within our own hearts; another external, though unseen; and *another* before our very eyes, but dressed

up in various forms, and pressing itself upon us in our every-day life : in other words, the *Flesh*, the *Devil*, and the *World*.

Hence it is necessary to be ever fighting, ever running the toilsome race, ever striving for the mastery.

But if the contest is so ceaseless and so arduous, and we ourselves so feeble, and so easily overcome, what reasonable hope is there of ultimate victory ?

Let us see what aids are at our disposal. Thank God, we have abundant help at hand.

There are, in the first place, *Religious Friends*, with whom we may take counsel, and whose very companionship will be to us a tower of strength. 'Two are better than one' in this warfare ; for 'as iron sharpeneth iron, so sharpeneth a man the countenance of his friend.' And who can tell how much we may in this way help one another ? Who can tell the immense

influence that one friend, whom we love and respect, may have upon our daily conduct ; checking us when disposed to do wrong, and encouraging us when inclined to do right ? And this influence is often felt by us, even though our friend may be far away from us.

Then, we are members of a *Christian Church* ; we are banded together in a great spiritual brotherhood ; we belong to a society framed not after man's model, but after God's. Here is an additional help. We are not alone, struggling each one by himself ; but we are a closely united body, an army in which each fills his rank. Our Church takes us by the hand, as it were, teaching us, guiding us, sustaining us. She provides services suited to our wants, and calls us to partake of them. She lays down certain rules and directions, and bids us follow them.

Further, we have our *Bibles*, from which we may gather daily nourishment *and* strength for our souls, and which

we may always appeal to as our great directory. If we read God's word daily—if we read it with reverence, humility, and prayer, looking up for God's teaching—we shall 'grow thereby;' our faith will be strengthened and our views established.

We have our seasons of *Private Prayer* too, when we may draw near to God, and obtain His aid. There, at the mercy-seat, is our constant source of strength, a spring from which we may draw living water, and which we can never exhaust; for God is always near, ready to hear our cries, and to relieve our wants.

And then we have our *Public Worship*, and God has given a special promise that He will meet us in His Sanctuary, and bless us.

Above all, there is that *Sacred Feast*, in which we may feed upon Christ, the Living Bread, and partake of His very Body and Blood, for the sustaining and refreshing of our souls.

Thus God is with us, hemming us in

with the Pillar and the Cloud, though we see them not; stretching out His hand to uphold us, and placing underneath the everlasting arms. Jesus too is with us, ever near, walking upon the waters of this world, and saying to us, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed thee: I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine. My cross is thy ransom, and Myself thy strength.' The Holy Spirit is also with us, 'helping our infirmities,' and invigorating us with His indwelling presence.

What want we more? Is there not here abundant help suited to our every want? Let us then fight our battle boldly. Let us run our race without flagging. Let us strive earnestly for the prize held out to us.

But we should never forget that our efforts must not only be vigorous and earnest, but they must also be unceasing. There is no time to lose, no room for delay, no pausing and resting, as if our warfare *were* accomplished. For the present we

must be as warriors, never laying down our weapons, or fancying that we may be at rest. We must fight the good fight of faith. We must guard the citadel. We must quit ourselves like men, and be strong.

But, thank God, it will not always be so. Our time of warfare will have an end. The cry of Battle will be exchanged for the shout of Victory. It was the thought of this that cheered the great Apostle. No one fought more manfully or incessantly than he did. He gloried in the wounds which he incurred for his Master's sake ; ' I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.' But then he looked forward to the resting days which were near.

God grant that we may be enabled to catch something of the Apostle's feeling which he expresses when he says, ' I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.' Here was assurance

without boasting, faith without over-confidence, trust without pride. He does not say, 'I have acquitted myself well. I have fought with praiseworthy courage.' But he says, 'I have fought, and it has been a good fight. The battle in which I have engaged is a noble warfare. My course, however imperfect, is now closing ; and God be praised, He has enabled me to keep the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.'

Oh that such may be the peaceful expression of our hearts as the time of our departure draws nigh !

CHAPTER XV.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF PURITY.

I PROPOSE in this chapter to take 'Purity' in its widest and fullest sense, as including purity of motive, purity of heart, inward holiness, an unstained life, &c. And to this subject, so important to the Christian, I wish faithfully to apply the Touchstone, so that each one of us may ascertain for himself if he possesses that purity which God requires of His people.

It seems as if there were some in the world in whom this purity is almost inborn. They are naturally amiable, naturally well disposed, naturally blameless in their conduct.

There are in America, and also in some parts of Europe, forests which have existed for hundreds of years. The trees in these

forests are of nature's growth. They have not been planted by the hand of man, but are the natural outcome of the soil. They are beautiful in their symmetry, and require no training.

Again, among our English cornfields we now and then see a field of wheat or oats which have been self-sown. The crop of the former year was gathered in when overripe, and some of the grain was shed, which has sprung up of its own accord, producing a crop in the coming year.

So there are some people who seem to be *naturally* religious, or rather religious from their earliest days. We may almost say that the seed of true religion was self-sown in their hearts. They are free from apparent sin. They are gentle and amiable. They have embraced, as a matter of course, the truth of God, and it has become almost a part of their nature. These are indeed beautiful characters as far as they go, though they are sometimes found unequal to any great effort, and may lack strength

at any special crisis. They have not, and probably never had, any doubts or misgivings. God's word is welcome to them. They receive it unhesitatingly, 'not as the word of man, but as the word of God, which liveth and abideth for them.'

To such pure minds as these '*all* things are pure.' They see no difficulties in the way. The temptations of the Great Enemy fly over them, and leave them unscathed. Their minds are too pure to be injured by these fiery darts. Ungodliness and worldliness do not seem to touch them; and the things of God are lovely in their eyes. There is evil all around them, but they are proof against it; they are not contaminated by it. One cannot but admire such naturally religious persons, and wish that there were more of them to be met with.

But there is another class of Christians, who are even more to be admired, and whose high standard we may all of us (if we seek God's help) be enabled to reach. I mean those who, though once perhaps

careless and worldly, have been awakened by the grace of God, have been enabled to conquer self, and by earnest and persevering prayer have become so conformed to the image of Christ that to live near to Him, and to walk in the narrow path of holiness, has become their second nature. They now breathe an atmosphere of purity. The heavenly life is already begun in them; they are living for another world, and to know God and to serve Him, to love Him and to work for Him, is their everyday delight. They have arrived at this state by slow degrees, and perhaps after much conflict, and have at length attained to that purity of heart which is acceptable to God.

Now to these also 'all things are pure.' What others stumble at, and what they themselves once stumbled at, is no longer to them an occasion of falling. They hear impure words spoken, and witness too often the deeds of the ungodly; but they *remain* untainted, their garments are un-

spotted by the flesh. Moreover, they are inclined to take a charitable view, and put a good interpretation upon, the words and conduct of others, which many are disposed to carp at. And as the bee gathers honey from every flower which comes in its way, so they turn to profit almost every event of life, extracting even good out of evil, and sweetness from what is bitter. Yes, to these pure ones 'all things are pure.'

But there is another side to the picture. There are some to whom *nothing* is pure ; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

Here is the reverse of what has been said. To one who is defiled by the admission of sin into his heart, who walks according to the course of this world, who gives way to the natural bent of his uncontrolled mind, who lets loose the rein, and allows himself in the practice of what is evil ; and further, who rejects the truth of God, and glories in his freedom from

those religious shackles which bind others, to him 'nothing is pure.' Evil is ever present with him, and like a jaundiced man, to whom whatever he see or tastes is nauseous, so he takes a wrong view of even what is right; for 'his mind and conscience are defiled.'

Now, to this I feel that you will readily assent. But we have regarded the subject as yet only in a general way. Let us now try and gather from it at least two practical lessons for *ourselves*.

The first is that we should, all of us, aim at this purity. 'Blessed (says our Lord) are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.' It is a great mercy if we have been taught to feel the evil of sin, if God in His love has led us to the cross, there to obtain pardon and acceptance with Him. Oh, who can tell how great is this blessing! Happy those who enjoy it, having been brought near to God through the atoning blood of Christ.

But there is a higher state than this. There is something more to be desired than mere pardon and acceptance. There is a yet more exalted standard for the Christian to reach. He must not rest until he does indeed hate whatever God hates, and love whatever He loves; until his one great desire is to be ever seeking to do God's will in all things, bearing the Saviour's cross cheerfully, and faithfully following His footsteps; ever striving, in fact, to be holy as God is holy, and perfect as He is perfect. Are we thus advancing in our Christian course? Is the work of purification going on within us? Are we growing in grace, and pressing on to a higher and yet higher state?

But there is one phase of Purity to which I cannot help specially alluding. I mean Social or Moral Purity, the purity of our thoughts, of our desires, of our words, and also of our deeds. Sometimes alas our bodies are the instruments of evil, when *they* ought only to be the instru-

ments of good. But we should remember that, as Christians, our bodies are consecrated to God's service, for it is written, 'The body is for the Lord.' Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost. 'I will dwell in them (He says), and walk in them.'

How careful then we should be to preserve them as such, to use them for no unholy purpose, to allow no stain to rest upon them, but to devote them to God's service, ever remembering the Apostle's injunction, 'Keep thyself pure.'

With regard to purity in general, may it ever be growing and deepening its hold of us, so that we may become pure within; and may unconsciously display such purity of heart and life, as will bear the scrutiny of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. It is true we cannot reach perfection, sinless perfection. We cannot attain to perfect holiness. But as he who would hit the distant target with his arrow must aim high, so should we.

God give us more and more of this purity of heart, and make us to grow up unto Him in all things.

Another lesson suggested to us by the consideration of this subject is, that Purity of heart is the best *safeguard* against unbelief. There is alas in the present day a great amount of scepticism, both open and secret, both head unbelief and heart unbelief; both that which springs from the intellect and that which arises from a spirit of indifference.

And where do we find this unbelief prevailing? It generally prevails among the *careless*, the *worldly*, and the *lovers of sin*; but rarely among the *true-hearted* and *pure-minded*. It is true that sometimes even God's children are exercised by unbelieving thoughts; for Satan tries hard to snatch them out of God's hands. But, as I showed in my first chapter, there is this great difference between the two: the one cherish and ex-

courage their unbelief; the other *abhor* it; it brings a dark shade over their souls.

And if you earnestly desire to be emancipated from the doubts and difficulties which may be troubling you, be much in prayer, draw *near to God*; and as He more and more manifests Himself unto you, the more will every cloud be dissipated which now gathers round you. ‘To the pure all things are pure,’ and the pureness and holiness of God’s revelation specially commends itself to those hearts which are undefiled by sin.

May God give us grace to rise higher in the Christian scale, to breathe more of the pure atmosphere of heaven, to live more in God’s presence here; that so, whenever He is pleased to call us hence, we may be ready, quite ready, to ‘depart and be with Christ, which is far better.’

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF RELIGIOUS DECISION.

It is not, I should think, at all likely that this book will fall into the hands of any one who is openly and directly opposed to religion. But the reader may possibly be in a doubting, undecided, and wavering state of mind — neither *for* Christ nor *against* Him—drawn up to a certain point by religious influence, but pulled down again by the stronger attractions of the world.

What is the consequence? Such persons are neither safe nor happy—not safe, because Christ disowns them; and not happy, for they know nothing of the peace, and joy, and comfort of real religion.

Even in worldly matters we despise a man *who is undecided*. A Physician may

be a man of great cleverness and skill, but if he is timid and hesitating we shall not care to have him by our bedside. An *Officer* in command of an army is powerless in action, if he lacks boldness and fixedness of character. A *Farmer* is not likely to succeed who has no definite plan, or determination of purpose, in the management of his land ; for ‘ he that observeth the wind (*i. e.* he that is always doubting about the weather), shall not sow ; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.’ And is it different in spiritual things ? No ; a hesitating spirit imperils the soul, and that for ever.

If there be one thing that I would recommend more earnestly than another, it is *fixedness in religion—decision for Christ*. It is necessary, for God requires it ; you cannot be useful without it ; and further, it is essential to your happiness.

God requires it. He is a jealous God. He says to us, ‘ My son, give me thy heart.’ He warns us, ‘ Ye cannot serve

two masters ;' ' Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life ;' ' The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence ;' ' He that is not with me is against me.'

How displeasing it must be to our Lord to see the coldness and indifference of His professed followers—to see the earnestness which men show as regards their farms and merchandise, their gains and pleasures ; and how indifferent they are about His glory and the salvation of their souls. Nothing less than real devotedness, and an actual surrender of the heart—in fact, nothing short of conversion—will be accepted by Him ; ' Except ye be converted, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Again, you *cannot be useful without it*. The *Tree* that is profitable is the tree that has firm hold of the soil, and is vigorous in its growth. The *Stream* which works the mill is that which flows in a steady, on-

ward course. The *Statesman*, who serves his sovereign and his country, is he who has a clear and decided policy, and who has fixed principles on which he acts. The man who *prosperes in life* is he who has a definite purpose of action, a clear course before him, and a fixed determination to carry out that purpose. Such an one, though on some points he may be less gifted than others, will be nearly sure to succeed. And it is *the Christian* whose mind is made up, who sees the right course and determinedly follows it, whose motto is, 'This one thing I do;' he it is who works heartily for his Lord, and accomplishes great things for Him.

This decision is further *essential to our happiness*. There are, I believe, many who are sound enough in their religious views, and clear in matters of doctrine, who recoil from error as they would from poison, and speak of truth as if they really *loved it*. Yes, and perhaps they do love

it. The doctrines of the gospel are welcome to them. Christ is to a certain extent precious to their souls. He is 'the ground and pillar' of their faith, the foundation of all their hopes. In time of danger and trial, or in the prospect of death, they fly to Him as their refuge, and cling to His Cross. And yet they cannot say that He is the abiding joy of their hearts, that they are happy in His service, that they rejoice in His love. And why so? Since in a measure they run well, what doth hinder them from *the full enjoyment* of Christ? There is nothing wrong on the outside. No defect is perhaps visible. And yet, if they speak the truth, they will confess that theirs is not a happy type of religion. They hear of it in others; they know that there is a peace which Christ gives, but it is not theirs; they possess it not; they are strangers to it.

Now, if we could look into their hearts, we should perhaps see the reason—they

have never surrendered themselves entirely to the Saviour; they have given themselves in part, but not wholly, to Him; they have kept back a little corner of their hearts for the world and for sin; they have not given Him *all*.

I am bound to tell you that you will never be happy so long as, like Ananias, you keep back a part of your offering. Christ will have it all, or you can be none of His. Let me then urge you at once to make this surrender, honestly, truly, and deliberately. That will indeed be a marked day in your life, when you resolve to consecrate yourself, with all you have and all you are, to the Lord.

Many, I know, make such a resolution as this under special excitement. Their feelings are wrought up to a high pitch, and in a moment of fervour they exclaim, 'Christ shall have my heart!' But then, when they get back again into the chilling world, their hearts, like the heated iron, return to their hardness. It is so with

thousands, and it is this which brings religion into contempt. And therefore I exhort you to make this surrender honestly, truly, and deliberately. Sit down and count the cost. Think what you will lose, and what you will gain, by such a step. You will lose perhaps the world's approval, and the world's friendship. You will lose the pleasures of sin for a season. But oh, how great your gain will be! You will win Christ. You will win heaven. You will win eternal life. Yes, count the cost, and then yield yourself up wholly and unreservedly to your Lord.

And now for a few practical words of advice.

We all of us in these days enjoy many and great religious advantages. Books, and Scriptures, and teachers are all near at hand to us. We have abundant means of grace, both public and private. Depend upon it, these things must have their effect upon us. They cannot leave us as

we are. Ask yourself then, what effect are they having upon me? Are they moving my sluggish heart? Are they stirring me up to newness of life?

Oh, if the Spirit of God has brooded over you, convincing you of sin, and making you feel its exceeding sinfulness and misery—showing Christ to you as the one only remedy for your guilt, as the priceless Saviour of the lost—if He has awakened in you the desire to lead a new and altered life—then I would say to you, and that with all affection, trifle not with convictions. If it be God's work, do not tamper with it. Quench not that gracious Spirit which has spoken to you. Let not the world choke the good seed. Let not its business, its cares, or its pleasures, draw you aside. Let not Satan tempt you with the fatal idea that you may at some other time give yourself to the Lord. No, it is *now*, or perhaps *never*.

Go, my brother, or my sister, and when *no eye is upon you*, on your bended knees

before God say, 'Lord, I give myself to Thee. Accept me, and make me Thine for ever.' And pray, pray earnestly, that God will give you grace and strength to be true and faithful to Him.

Go out into the world, and with feelings, and desires, and hopes altogether changed, live for Christ, live for heaven. Desire only to do the will of God, and to serve Him heartily during your little day of life.

In following Christ you will find many difficulties, but God will give you all the help you need. His House will be open to you, and you will find great help in Public Prayer, and under the preaching of the Word. The sacred feast of Christ's Body and Blood will be spread for you, and you will receive strength in that most precious ordinance—spiritual food to sustain and refresh your soul—a blessed means of uniting you more closely with your Lord. And remember too, the way is ever open for your drawing near to Him in private.

He is always on the mercy-seat, ready to receive you. 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'

Finally I entreat you, by the love and gentleness of Christ, by that love which brought Him down from heaven for you, by that love which has borne with you day after day, and year after year, by that love which is ready to welcome you and make you His, give Him your allegiance, give Him your heart, give Him the little remnant that is left of your life. Come to Him as you are, not waiting to be fit, but in all your unfitness, and all your guilt. Come to Him as the Physician to heal you, as One who is able and willing (oh, how willing!) to pardon you, and wash away your sins in His own blood. Believe Him when He says, 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy *sins*.'

Come to Him *now*. Tomorrow may be too late. And may God give you grace to adopt the Psalmist's *resolution*, and to experience the Psalmist's *joy*, 'My heart is fixed, O God; my heart is fixed: I will sing, and give praise.'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF OPPORTUNITY.

To use well and wisely our time is a matter of the greatest importance ; for oh, how quickly is it passing away ! We should seize our opportunities whilst they exist, and ‘gather up the fragments which remain, that nothing be lost.’

The value of time—its exceeding preciousness—is beyond measure. Our days and hours hasten by, never to return. They are like water, which, when once spilt, cannot be gathered up again—like the rays of the sun, which at the moment may warm and invigorate us, but cannot be laid up for future use. Our lives are very short at best ; and on the manner in which they are spent will depend our *condition* for ever.

Who can say then how important is every moment which is given to us? It may be turned to good account, or it may be wasted, or misspent. No wonder then that we are charged to 'walk circumspectly'—like travellers on a dangerous road, looking around them on every side, and prepared for any difficulty which may suddenly arise. We should live cautiously and carefully, 'redeeming the time,' and making the most of it, while it is ours.

It is very important, through life, to *seize our opportunities*, when they occur. It is so in worldly matters. How many owe their whole success in life to the power of being able to see the golden moment, and catch it ere it flies! The difference between success and failure is often owing to the fact that one grasps his chance, and another lets it slip by. An unanswered letter, an appointment broken, a train missed, may for aught we know change the colour of our whole existence. And as we

look back, do we not see upon what very trivial things—mere accidents apparently—have hinged the most important events of our lives? A *situation* applied for at once, and gained just at the nick of time—a *proposal* cordially accepted, and not put aside and neglected—a *letter* answered without delay—an *appointment* kept, with trouble and pains perhaps, but still kept—these small things have many a time proved to be the keystone of the arch, on which our success in life has been built.*

Promptness and decision are all-important for those who desire to leave their mark in the world. Of course the wisest will sometimes make mistakes. But on the whole, far more harm is done by sluggishness and hesitation than by haste and decision. The feeble man, who never can make up his mind, who lets chance after chance go by, is always a little too late for everything, and never knows that success

* Many ideas in this chapter are suggested by a passage in *Plain Speaking*, by the author of *John Halifax*.

is near at hand, until it passes away, and is gone for ever. Only for a single moment is the tide at its height, and once turned, it flows back for ever; the opportunity is lost.

Thus the *prudent Farmer* will seize the proper moment to reap his corn, or to cut his hay; and will watch the fluctuations in the market to sell his produce. The *wise General* will lead on his troops to attack the enemy when off their guard. The *Sailor* will wait till the storm-signals are lowered, before he puts to sea. The *Physician* anxiously watches his patient, and at the turn of the fever administers the reviving tonic.

This is 'redeeming the time,' seizing the opportunity as it offers, striking while the iron is hot, acting at the proper time. And so also should we act in matters which concern our souls.

If an opportunity is presented to us of doing some important work, we should at once seize it; or the work will be done by

others, or remain altogether undone. A word spoken in season, how good is it ! An act done just at the right time, and in the right way, what great results it may accomplish ! It may prove to be the saving of a soul, and the rescuing of one who was on the verge of going wrong. 'To everything (says Solomon) there is a season, and a time to every purpose ; a time to weep, and a time to laugh ; a time to mourn, and a time to dance ; a time to reap, and a time to sow ; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.'

If *Moses* had attempted to deliver Israel at the wrong moment, he would have failed ; but he waited upon God, and He showed him when and how to act.

If *Joshua* had not struck the city of Jericho at the appointed time, its walls would not have fallen.

When *St. Paul* was at Philippi he went on the Sabbath day to a place where prayer was wont to be made, and there he joined the little band of worshippers.

They put the sacred volume into his hand, and he expounded it. He seized the opportunity; and the result was the conversion of Lydia, one of his Jewish hearers.

Or, to bring the matter more home to ourselves, if God in His great mercy draws our hearts towards Himself, it is important at once to obey His call; and not to hesitate, lest the working of His grace should cease. A person goes to church. He has gone for years; but to-day he hears something which comes home to his very heart. Here is God's opportunity. He seems Himself to speak as He never spoke before. That voice may never speak so plainly again. Oh listen when He thus speaks: it may be the means of saving you. Let it pass—and its sound, its power, will soon die out, never to be heard or felt again.

And what shall we say of those who let days, and months, and years pass, without thinking of anything beyond their own ease and enjoyment? Time is to them as a tale that is told, which has no particular interest

for them, and is soon forgotten. It is like a vapour, which rises before them, but is speedily swept away, and is gone for ever. One day is like another—all equally unprofitable—all gone to waste—nothing done for God or for eternity—a number of precious opportunities, but not one of them improved.

Bear in mind then that we all have *our opportunities*, if we will look out for them, opportunities of doing good, opportunities of benefiting our fellow-creatures, opportunities of doing some work for God ; and for every one of these opportunities we must give an account. If neglected, great will be our loss ; if seized, what great things may be done ; how much may be accomplished, God may be honoured ; souls may be saved—our own souls, or the souls of others.

Again, our time *is very, very short*, and all depends upon the right employment of it. These striking words might once have been seen, written in large letters on the *wall of an Italian house* : ‘ A God ; a mo-

ment ; an eternity. A God who sees thee ; a moment which flees from thee ; an eternity which awaits thee.' And remember that our time is contracting, and becoming shorter, every day.

One of the cruel tortures said to have been invented in some heathen country was that of a cell, which at the prisoner's first entrance presented an appearance of comfort and ease. By degrees however he observed the dimensions of his chamber beginning to contract, and the fact became more appalling every day. Slowly, but terribly, the sides drew closer, and the unhappy victim was at last crushed to death.

What an emblem does this suggest of the sinner's contracting day of grace ! Oh, what would the poor victim in such a cell have given to see the door open ? Would he have lingered for a moment, think you ? Would he not have seized the opportunity, and escaped for his life ?

We have, many of us, done but little in

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the way of 'redeeming the time.' We have allowed it to pass by unimproved. We have lived too long in Sodom. Oh that we may arise as Lot did, and be gone ; and while we linger, may the angels of God lay hold of our hands, and be merciful to us, and bring us forth, and set us without the city ; so that we may never look back any more, but may escape to the mountain, and dwell safely upon the Rock of Ages.

If young, redeem the time whilst it is yours ; and all the more so if old, for but a short moment or two remains for you.

Old and young alike, we have not an instant to lose. Let us redeem the time, before the evil days come, when our difficulties will perhaps increase an hundred-fold. Let us take the tide at the flood, knowing that perhaps no more tides will come, at least for *us* ; for there are but twelve hours in the day, and our last hour may be very near,

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF UNITY.

JERUSALEM of old is often spoken of in the Bible as an emblem of the Church of God. The City was very dear to the Jews, and never more so than in the time of David.

One can imagine the feelings of a devout Pilgrim in those days approaching the place in which all his best affections were centered—the home of his soul—the City of his God—his beloved Jerusalem. No wonder that he should exclaim, as he does in the first verse of Psalm 121, on drawing near to the City, which he so dearly loved, ‘I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem,’

And then he breaks out in words of joyful admiration, when he thinks of that sacred City ; its foundations firm upon the holy hills ; its buildings carefully grouped together ; and all securely hemmed in with walls and ramparts—‘ a City compact together,’ or as our Prayer-book Version has it, ‘ at unity in itself.’

And ought not this to be a true picture of *our* Jerusalem now, the City of our God, the Church of Christ—beautiful in its construction, rich in its spiritual privileges, and blest by its internal and external unity? Alas the Church’s picture in the present day answers but very faintly to Jerusalem of old ; for it cannot yet be said of her, that she is ‘ at unity in herself.’

This was the keynote to that solemn prayer, which the Saviour uttered just before He passed the brook Cedron, on His way to the garden of His agony. Looking upon His poor helpless followers, *and* well knowing all that was before

them, He said, 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also that shall believe on me through their word, *that they all may be one.*' But as we now look upon the Christian Church, after a lapse of nearly nineteen centuries, we are forced to confess that Christ is divided, that His people are not one, that there is a schism in the body.

And this state of division is for ever being thrown in our teeth, and justly so, by the Infidel and the Romanist. It seriously impedes the onward progress of Christianity; it mars the beautiful symmetry of the Church; it is a stumbling-block to the unbeliever; and above all, it is displeasing to Him who is 'the Author of peace, and the Lover of concord.' But there is *one* very hopeful characteristic of the present day. There is among the people of God just now a feeling after unity; and we may regard this as a blessed evidence that God is with us, and has not left us to ourselves.

We have of late heard much of the long hoped for 'Reunion of Christendom,' which usually means our union with the Greek and Oriental Churches. Such a tendency is doubtless most desirable ; and it is well that a flag of truce should be held out towards our far-off brethren, who, amidst many errors, still love the same Saviour whom we love, reverence the written word of God, hold many vital truths in common with ourselves, and from whom no anathemas have been ever hurled against us. In the way of this union, however, there are at present many almost insuperable impediments.

But no Body of Christians has made a more practical and hopeful effort towards the Reunion of Christendom, than that interesting branch of Catholic Reformers, which has during the last few years sprung up in Germany. These Old Catholics have already given up their allegiance to the Decrees of the Council of Trent, and are taking measures which are very conducive to *Christian union*.

These are many symptoms of a prevailing desire, which now seems to be animating the Christian Church.

Among the Protestant Bodies too in our own land, efforts are constantly being made to unite, and bring into closer union those who love the Saviour. And though as yet these efforts have effected little, the very desire and attempt show that the spirit of union exists among us. And surely these Separatists have the chief claim upon our concern. It is true that the Romish Church, and also the Greek Church, in some respects approximate to our own, as far as outward organization is concerned. They are Episcopalians as well as ourselves. But still the religious bodies at home are nearer to us in point of doctrine, and also in matters of practice. They consist too of those who are our kinsmen according to the flesh, and according to the spirit also. Clearly then *our first duty* is towards them.

And is there not in our own hearts a

similar yearning to that which I have expressed? Is there not an earnest longing that, some day, the scattered members of Christ's flock may be again drawn together into one and the same fold, and under that one heavenly Shepherd who has laid down His life for the sheep, when a brighter day will dawn upon the present confusion of Christendom? I believe that there will be such a union; and then 'the envy of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim;' but the flock shall feed in one pasture.

And I cannot help feeling too, that the Church of England may one day be the focus, around which these separated units may be gathered. She is eminently fitted to sound the note of union; and she seems endued with more power than perhaps any other body to gather the dispersed together.

I say this for many reasons. In the

first place, there is a *Fixedness* and *Solidity* about our Church which cannot easily be shaken. She is an historic Church, tracing back her spiritual pedigree to the earliest times. Her Creeds, her Sacraments, her Apostolic Ministry, bind her, as with a threefold cord, to the first ages of the faith, and preserve her essential unity with the Church of the past. And thus she is protected from the risk of change, which necessarily besets all new methods of presenting the gospel to mankind.

And although these creeds and articles of ours, sound as they are, and the apostolical succession of our orders, are worthless, if they be not accompanied by apostolic character in those who minister, and apostolic truth in their teaching, still we prize them as a precious treasure; and we believe that many would be thankful to share these privileges with us, if they could share them without the cost of tearing themselves away with violence from their present moorings.

Then there is in our Church a *Comprehensiveness* also, which can scarcely be found in any other. Conscious that all minds are not to be moulded into the same type, we are disposed to treat with forbearance the many schools of thought within our Church, and the various divisions without. And it is just because she is so comprehensive, that she is admirably fitted to include within her limits, and then to consolidate, the multiform variety which exists in the several Christian Bodies.

These are some of the grounds, on which it is hoped that our Church may perhaps, in the good providence of God, be the rallying-point for the gathering together of the true Israel of God. In fact a large portion of our brethren around us are separated from us by the thinnest possible partition, so far as theological truth is concerned. With many we are one in thought, one in hope, one almost in doctrine. But alas we are severed in

worship—parted from one another at those very seasons when we ought to be rallying round the same Saviour, and kneeling side by side at the same Throne of Grace.

And yet, even in this respect, we seem just now to be approaching one another. Many of our Church Prayers are interwoven with theirs; and several of their ministers are more than half disposed to accept our Liturgy. Why then should they remain aloof from us, when they might, perhaps with increased comfort, work side by side with us in the great effort of life? It does indeed seem as if little, very little, were needed to bring us together.

And has this never struck you, that the points on which we *differ* from our brethren are much less vital than those in which we *agree*; and also that there are many who outwardly dissent from us in their dogmatic theology, but are in perfect harmony with us in their inward and spiritual life?

Doubtless there are difficulties in the way. But is there not something that we can all do, as individuals, towards the restoration of this blessed unity?

1st. Let us humble ourselves before God on account of *our own internal divisions*. These have been, and still are, no small hindrance to those who would otherwise be ready to cast in their lot with us. How unseemly, how hurtful, how dishonouring to God, are our petty strifes and divisions, our contentions about postures and vestures, our anxiety to exalt one section of the Church to the depression and subjection of the other! These are the things which impede us in our work; they are the plague-spots in our Christianity; they mar our usefulness without, and our peace within.

Oh that God would remove this hindrance, breaking down our party barriers, healing our breaches, and making us as one compact and united body! Oh that the *citizens* of our own Zion would so cultivate

the spirit of harmony, that she might be known of all to be 'a city at unity in itself!' Then, as a Christian writer observes, 'might she, with some hope of success, stretch forth loving hands to those beyond her gates, and lead them in, not with the mean exaltation of mere partizans, but as those who cordially welcome them to a common brotherhood.'

But this is not all. There is also another thing for which we should humble ourselves. Are there not many now separated from us, whom we have lost in days gone by, by our coldness and deadness; and others too, the blame of whose separation rests, not so much with those who went out from us, as with our Church who drove them out?

The first real step then towards union is to seek pardon from God for our own guilt in the matter.

2ndly. We must be prepared to make reasonable *sacrifices*, if we would effect so

great and glorious an object. We have hitherto expected perhaps that all the sacrifices should be made by others, and none by ourselves.

But when we speak of sacrifices, let us understand what we mean. We must not of course sacrifice, even for the sake of unity, a single fundamental principle of Christian faith or practice: our allegiance to God's unchanging truth forbids it. We cannot certainly give up our Creeds or Formularies, no matter who may desire us to do so; for that would be striking down the very basis of true unity. We cannot abandon the supremacy of Scripture as our rule of faith; nor the Sacraments, for they are Christ's appointments; nor the right of little children to be admitted as members of the Church of Christ; for such is their heritage, which they have received from the Lord. We cannot for an instant loose our hold of the great truth of the Three equal Persons in the blessed Trinity; or of *the finished work of Christ*; for His cross

is the one great rallying-point, around which we can alone meet.

But beyond these things which cannot be given up, but must be held fast, there is a wide range of matters, which I for one would, for the sake of unity, be ready to concede—such as a reasonable plan, consistent with primitive practice, for the reception of ministers belonging to other bodies into our communion; a certain modification of our Services, not any change that would affect matters of doctrine, but merely rearrangement of these Services, so as to bring them into conformity with the ever-changing wants of our people. I would concede also, if necessary, the liberty under certain special circumstances to use other than our prescribed Form of Prayer; and a larger admission of earnest, but unordained, men to be joint-labourers with the Clergy in the work of the evangelisation. I would yield much, very much, that is dear to me, if by such a sacrifice I could forward

the great object of which I have spoken. But it would be necessary to be very careful, lest whilst we strive after union on one side, we cause disunion on the other.

3rdly. If we would bring others into our fold, let us seek to understand more clearly, and to carry out more fully, the principles of our own Church. It is not laxity in this respect that will draw others to us. If we hold on loosely to our own communion, men will naturally argue that we can only be feebly attached to it. It is better to be open and decided in the expression of our convictions, whilst we exercise the utmost love and forbearance towards those who are not of us. They will despise half-heartedness in us, whether it be in our Christianity, or our Churchmanship.

Above all, let us *pray for Unity*. I have said that there are vast difficulties in the way of what we so much desire;

and we see not at present *how* these can be removed. ‘Then, is it not our wisdom to lay the matter before God? for He, and He alone, can remove all hindrances, be they ever so great. There is surely no need to suggest to Him the means for accomplishing this object.’ Rather let us pray for unity, though we may not be agreed as to *how* it shall be brought about. Let us entreat God to grant our desire according to His wisdom, not our own, and also according to His plan, and not according to the scant measure of our apprehension. When we are weak, then are we strong; and never so strong, or so sure of our Father’s guidance and blessing, as when we come to Him, confessing with all our hearts that ‘He knoweth our necessities before we ask Him, and our ignorance in asking.’

It may be said by some that Unity is but a lovely dream, a cloud picture in the sky. But why so? It was a blessed reality in the early Church; and it may, and will, be so again. It was as hard in Apo-

stolic days, as it is now, for men to think alike and work together. If then we earnestly desire to win back apostolical unity, let us pray for apostolic fervour and apostolic love.

Be the Cross the one centre around which we rally. Let our eye be fixed there, and all else will appear as nothing in comparison. Then will our differences vanish, and we shall be all 'of one heart and one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity ; and we shall with one mind and one mouth glorify God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP.

MY reader is probably a regular church-goer, and one who desires to go there, not merely for form's sake, but to get a real blessing to his soul. I propose then to make three inquiries :

What should we go to the House of God for ?

What should we bring with us in going there ?

And what should we endeavour to carry away ?

The First of these will occupy the present chapter ; and of the other Two I shall speak in my next.

What then should we go to the House of God for ? I answer, for a twofold pur-

pose ; namely, to speak to God, and to hear His message to us. We should speak to Him in Prayer ; and we should listen to the word which He sends us by the mouth of His Ministers.

In speaking to God, what should be the nature of our communication with Him ?

Confession is a leading feature in it. We should come before God in deep humility and self-abasement, placing ourselves as penitents at His footstool. It is true, He knows our sins better than we know them ourselves : still it becomes us, in our approaches to Him, to begin by confessing all that is wrong in us, and by acknowledging our unworthiness in His sight.

Such was the attitude of the Publican in the Temple. Such was the manner in which the repenting Prodigal drew near to his Father. And you will observe that our Church thus prepares her worshippers to *enter upon their work*. She brings before

us a string of Texts, everyone of which is of a penitential character ; and then bids us kneel down and join in a General Confession, telling God that like lost sheep we are ever erring and straying from the path marked out for us.

Another feature—perhaps the principal feature—in our communication with God is *Petition*, or *Entreaty*. We *ask* for something. Most of the Collects and Prayers which we put up are so many petitions from needy souls to Him who is the great and gracious Giver. In the Litany, for instance, we *ask* directly for something in every clause—our petitions being not merely for ourselves, but for others also. Indeed the very word ‘Litany’ means Supplicatory Prayer. And have we not much to ask, when we come into God’s presence ? Should we not come as suppliants, lifting up our earnest cries for the pardon which we so much need, and for the supplies which we are continually requiring ?

Then another important and delightful feature in our communication with God is *Praise*. We go into His House to thank Him for His goodness to us. And for this purpose we repeat large portions of the Psalms: for what are many of those Psalms, but beautiful songs of praise, which express our thankfulness better than we can express it in our own words?

The Creeds too, which are somewhat dry in themselves, may be repeated in this spirit of Praise, as a declaration of our thankful belief in what God is, and in what He has done for us. And therefore in the Rubric before the Creeds our Prayer-book directs that they be said or *sung*.

To this may be added the singing of those Hymns of Praise, in which our hearts find vent for their holy joy; and also that beautiful Prayer towards the close of our service, which expresses our thankfulness for all the ordinary blessings of this life, but above all for God's inestimable love in *the great work of our redemption*.

But I pass on to yet another feature in our communication with God, which I can only describe by the word *Worship*.

Now, this word is commonly used to signify Prayer generally ; and thus we call our service, 'Public Worship.' But I wish now to use the word in its more restricted sense. By the term 'Worship' I wish to describe something apart and distinct from Confession, or Petition, or Praise—something different from either.

The old English word was originally 'Worthship,' signifying the honour given to worth. It was formerly used in reference to *men*, as well as *God*. Thus in Wickliffe's Translation of the Bible, the Fifth Commandment ran thus ; ' *Worship* thy Father and Mother ;' that is, Honour them. And we have retained to this day the expression in our Marriage Service, 'With my body I thee *worship*,' or reverence : also in certain passages of the Bible, as in Daniel, where it is said that 'the king worshipped Daniel.' Dan. ii. 46.

To worship God then is to pay an act of homage to Him, such as a Servant would pay to his Lord, or a Subject to his Sovereign. In our ordinary Prayers we ask God for something : we expect something from Him : we pour out the heart, with all its felt necessities, trials, and wants, before Him. But in the act of *Worship* there is the idea not so much of benefit to ourselves, as of glory to God.

It is something more too than *Adoration*. Adoration is the lifting up of the heart in silence ; but when we express this in earnest words, that is *Worship* in the truest sense — when we bow before the Lord, and pour forth the reverential feelings of our hearts.

When Solomon reared the Temple of old, his design, in all its magnificence and grandeur, was to show forth the honour due to God. The Prayers, and the gorgeous Ceremonies, and the immense and costly Offerings, the clouds of Incense, the flood of Music poured forth on that occasion,

were all to express the honour, and glory, and praise of God. But *we*, in these days, come before God with a much simpler ritual, and with less costly ceremonies. But still, direct *Worship* is a part of our service. We worship Him whom our hearts adore, and whom the very saints in heaven worship also.

Let us take the Lord's Prayer as an instance of what I am saying. Analyse that glorious Prayer, and you will find that much of it is simply *Worship*. The main idea pervading it is the honour and glory of God. We place ourselves before Him as our Father, and we at once perform an act of *Worship*, exclaiming, 'Hallowed be thy name : thy kingdom come : thy will be done, so that earth may be like heaven.' And then, after three Petitions—one for daily *food*, another for daily *pardon*, and a third for daily *preservation* from evil—we close with the words, 'Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever.'

The 'Te Deum' too is a Hymn of *Worship*. There are here and there direct Peti-

tions in it, and expressions of Praise ; but the great body of it is strictly speaking *Worship*. We declare our admiration of God : we acknowledge Him to be the Lord. 'To thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry, Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth ;' 'Day by day we magnify thee, and we worship thy name, ever world without end.' The 'Gloria Patri' is also an act of *Worship* ; for in it we give honour and glory to the eternal Trinity.

Again, towards the close of the 'Litany' we exclaim, 'O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us the noble works that thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them.' Observe, there is not a word here of Petition or Supplication—nothing is asked for ; it is simple *Worship*. We express our adoring sense of what God has done, and is still doing, for us.

And once more, in the Communion Service we also *worship* God in the strictest sense, when we say, 'With Angels and

Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Hosts ; heaven and earth are full of thy glory : Glory to thee, O God, most high.' And again, ' We praise thee, we bless thee, we *worship* thee : for thou only art holy ; thou only art the Lord ; thou only, O Christ, art most high in the glory of God the Father.'

I lay stress upon these particular acts of *Worship*, because I think it is well that, when we come here, we should feel that it is not merely to ask something from God—not merely under the pressure of our wants—but that we come to honour Him, to do Him homage, to glorify Him, to give Him the only thing we can give Him—the calves, or offerings, of our lips.

But it may be said with regard to Public Worship generally, and indeed all our services, ' How little can a poor sinner honour God !' This is true. But we must

give Him what we are able to give, and what we know He will mercifully accept.

In Isaiah's day the Jews brought their burnt offerings and their sacrifices; and the Lord was ever ready to accept them at their hands. *Our* sacrifices are those of Prayer, and Praise, and adoring Worship; and these He is graciously pleased to accept, if we place them on Christ's Altar, pleading His atonement. Yes, God loves to receive these offerings of our hearts: they are a sacrifice and a sweet-smelling savour to Him.

Such then are the component parts of our Public Services, so far as *our Addresses to God* are concerned.

But there is another object for which we go to the House of God, and one of no small importance; and that is to *receive the messages which He is pleased to send us*. Christ employs Ministers as His Ambassadors. They come to us in God's name. They speak to us for Him. They

preach Christ to us. They tell us of His love, and of His all-sufficiency to save. They speak of Him as the Friend of our souls, as the living, loving one, in whose shelter there is safety, and in whose bosom there is a resting-place of repose and peace.

If we undervalue this part of the Service, we are depreciating that Ordinance which God has appointed as the great means of bringing men to Himself; for it has pleased Him by the foolishness of preaching, not merely to benefit, but to save them which believe.

This however I would say, That important as preaching is, it is not, as some would seem to think, everything, or even the most important part of the service of the Sanctuary. Our Church reminds her children, more than any other Church does, that they are worshippers, and that Prayer is the leading feature in our Christian Assemblies.

Many of our brethren who belong to other Churches fall into the error of re-

garding the Sermon as the one great and absorbing feature in their religious gatherings. With them the Sermon is everything, and Prayer is a secondary object. This is clearly a mistake. For the chief errand on which we come here is to *pray*. The House of God is not merely a 'Place of Hearing,' but a 'House of Prayer.'

Let me now offer you two or three affectionate words of counsel.

Attend the House of God, not sometimes but always, not spasmodically but regularly. Your soul will starve, if it be not periodically nourished by those appointed means of grace, which God has in mercy provided for you. Persons frequently neglect the assembling of themselves together, on the plea that they can be just as much benefited by reading and praying at home. But has not the Lord promised a blessing, and His own special presence, when we are gathered in His name? And dare we choose *another* method of our own? Should we

not thus be dishonouring God ? Suppose a Friend of ours were to die, we might perhaps spend our time profitably by shutting ourselves up, and refusing to honour his memory by our presence at his funeral. Or, if some great Person were to be passing along the street, we might feel as much respect, and derive more profit to ourselves, by remaining at home, and refusing to join the throng which goes out to do him honour. But this would be but a poor way of showing either that we truly lament the dead, or really honour the living. And after all, the question, What will it profit me ? is not the question on which God would have our religious duties turn ; but, How shall I bring glory to Him, and live as His faithful and true servant ?

Never go to the Sanctuary with itching ears in the hope of hearing something new, something that will please and excite you ; but go there to *pray*. Go there to place yourself in the very presence of God,

to praise Him, to adore Him, to worship Him.

And remember that your bearing in the House of God has its influence on others. The conduct of one really devout and earnest person will have a blessed effect on the worshippers around him. It will tend to make others devout and earnest also.

Lastly, be very watchful. Indeed I know nothing which needs more close watchfulness than our church-going.

God is there to bless us. He stands with open hands, offering us His bounteous gifts. Christ is in the midst of our assemblies, as the great Intercessor, ready to intercede for us, to carry the prayers and praises from our poor lips to His Father's ear, and adding the priceless value of His own merits to our feeble cries.

Ah, but there is another present, watching every avenue by which he may dart into our minds some worldly, trifling *thought*; bent upon spoiling our devotions,

and robbing us of that comfort and peace which God promises to the true worshipper.

Before you go then, and whilst there, 'Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation;' for though the spirit may be willing, the flesh is miserably weak.

May God ever bless to you the Services of His Church; and especially that richest and best of all, in which we commemorate the dying love of our blessed Lord. May you ever find in that sacred ordinance the comfort, the strength, and the refreshment which you long for! May it be a time to you of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, so that as you return from it you may be able to say, 'I sat under his banner with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love.'

CHAPTER XX.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP
(continued).

IN the last chapter I confined myself to the inquiry, 'What should we go to the House of God for?' And I showed you that the purpose for which we go there is to draw near to God with our *Confessions*, our *Supplications*, and our *Worship*, or Homage; and further, to receive at the mouth of God's Minister *the Message* which He is pleased to send us.

In the present chapter we are to make the following inquiries—'What should we *bring with us* to the House of God?' and 'What should we *carry away*?'

'What should we *bring with us* to the House of God?' In one sense we need *bring* nothing but our own emptiness; for

our errand here is to obtain a gift, rather than to bring one. We should come like the impotent folk to Bethesda's Pool, that we may be healed of our spiritual infirmities by the waters of life; or like the multitude in the wilderness, to be fed by the Saviour's hand.

But yet, when we come to God's Ordinances, much depends upon *the spirit* in which we come. What is a rich feast to one, may afford no nourishment to another. The person who comes to church, as he would go to any other place, will be very apt to miss the blessing which his heavenly Father has to give him, and will return with his heart untouched, and his soul unfed; whilst he whose mind is rightly ordered, whose look is upward, and whose heart, like the breathless stag, 'panteth after the water-brooks,' 'thirsting for God, the living God,' will not come in vain. Such an one God loves to bless; and whilst He sends the *rich empty away*, He satisfieth the longing

soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

First then, if you desire the Services of the Sanctuary to be really profitable, it is necessary that you should bring with you *a prayerful and devout spirit.*

Our business there is with a prayer-hearing God. We come, as I have already shown you in my last chapter, to confess our sins to Him ; to seek a blessing from Him for our needy souls ; to praise Him for His great and varied mercies ; to worship Him with our adoring hearts. What need then have we to be prepared for so important a work, to have our hearts tuned for so sacred an employment, and to have the world driven out of our thoughts ! For how can we expect our minds to be in a fit state to hold intercourse with God, if we rush into His presence fresh from our worldly occupations, and with worldly feelings still clinging to us ?

Before coming then to the House of

God, and ere you leave your own house, I would advise you to spend a few moments in prayer. Kneel down, and ask God to give you that preparation of heart, which you so much need. Ask Him to give you a devout spirit, to keep your mind from wandering, and to raise it up to higher and holier things.

Secondly, it is important to bring with you a spirit of *Reverence*. It has been remarked that the highest type of reverence is that which was seen in the Cherubim around the throne, veiling their faces as they chanted God's praises. I am afraid it must be admitted that the tone and temper of the present day is somewhat irreverent. It extends to all subjects. It has been well remarked, that he who has not reverence for divine things will have but little for human things. Irreverence in religion breeds irreverence in ordinary life.

But this spirit of Reverence should especially be seen in the Sanctuary. There

we are in the presence of a holy God. He is everywhere, but especially in the assemblies of His saints.

When Moses drew near to the Bush in Horeb, he was charged to take off his shoes, for it was holy ground: God was there. And so He is in His Sanctuary. Endeavour then to realise His presence. Remember that it is the House, the Palace, the Presence Chamber of the Great King. We should 'keep silence before Him.' The friendly greeting, the words of kind and Christian courtesy, should be reserved till we have left His courts.

The habit which prevails in our churches of offering up a few secret words of prayer on entering, and of pausing for a while for a similar purpose after the Benediction has been given at the close, is very conducive to this reverential spirit.

Our practice too of devoutly kneeling when we offer up prayer is no small help to our devotions. I would not only advise all *my* hearers to kneel, but I would go

further, and recommend those of you who are able, not to indulge in that kind of compromise which some make between sitting and kneeling, a posture which is neither one thing nor the other. This was certainly not the posture which David intended when he exclaimed, 'O come, let us worship, and *bow down*, and *kneel* before the Lord our Maker.' Neither can we imagine this to have been the posture of our Lord, when, in the garden of Gethsemane, He poured forth those words of earnest supplication to His heavenly Father. Nor again, if we picture to ourselves a Criminal condemned to death, can we suppose for a moment that he would use an attitude of ease in falling down before the Judge, and entreating him in mercy to reverse the fatal sentence. No, it would be the real kneeling of a Suppliant. And this is the posture that I would recommend to you, unless you are prevented by age, or by bodily infirmity, which would of course render it impossible.

In saying this however let me remind you that, much as there is in a devout posture, it is nothing without a lowly and devout heart. A devout heart however, and a reverential frame, generally go together, the one helping the other. For if we kneel, it will help to keep us in a prayerful spirit ; and if we have a prayerful spirit, we shall assuredly be constrained to kneel.

Thirdly, it is important to bring with you a *humble* and *teachable* spirit. Do not criticise God's minister who leads you in prayer. Whether his reading be too fast or too slow for your taste, whether he performs his task well or ill, accept it ; and let it not interfere with your devotions. Satan will greatly rejoice, if he can thus disturb your prayers, and lead you away from the one great object for which you come. And when the Preacher addresses you, think not of his manner, or his action, or the language with which he clothes the

truth of God ; but feel that it is a heavenly message which he is sent to deliver to you ; and say within yourself, as Cornelius and his companions said to St. Peter, ' We are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.' Remember that your Minister is Christ's ambassador ; and therefore receive from him with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your soul.

There is just now too much of sensationalism and excitement among us, and not enough of sober earnestness. Is it not the case that when a celebrated Preacher is expected in any of our churches, many will forthwith leave their own congregation, with whom they usually worship, and flock to hear him ? And what is worse—if an eccentric Preacher were advertised—a man who was known to step a little out of the common path—who was in the habit of saying startling things to attract or amuse his hearers—a man who had some peculiarity either of manner or of gesture—this would

be quite enough to gather a crowded audience.

But how sad that it should be so ! Are we mere children, whose fancies need to be excited ? Is religion a plaything with us ? Do we mistake God's house for a place of entertainment ? Do we go there to be amused ? Or do we not rather go there as poor and helpless, needing to be taught, and guided, and strengthened on our difficult road to heaven ?

Ah, it was not without a meaning that Jesus said, 'Take heed how ye hear.' You hear, not merely for the passing moment, but for eternity ; not merely to gratify your taste, or to satisfy a morbid craving ; but you hear that your soul may live.

Let me then repeat to you what I have said. We should bring to the House of God a *prepared* heart, a *reverential* frame, and also a *humble and teachable* spirit.

I will now say a few words as to what

we should *carry away* with us from the House of God.

Remember, Public Worship is not the end, but the means. When a person comes to church, something is gained, but not everything. He has put himself in the way of good; but he himself may have received no good. Though he has been near to Jesus, he may not have touched even the hem of His garment. Though he has been to the banqueting-house, his soul may still starve.

But if our attendance here has been blest of God—if our worship has been profitable—if it has been something more than an outward form—something deeper, truer, and more spiritual—then we shall carry away a vast blessing with us; we shall be holier and better; we shall feel all the week a fuller sense of God's presence; we shall be brought so much nearer to Him; and this will have a sanctifying influence on our whole lives.

The true Christian worshipper will

carry out in the World what he has learnt in the Church. He will go and live every day a Christian life, and thereby show the power which religion exerts on his heart and conduct. If we are no better for our Prayers and our Sacraments, no holier in our daily lives, no more upright in our dealings than mere men of the world, no more truthful and reliable than others, then is there something wrong with us, and our church-going has been a mere form without any substance.

It is well to ask ourselves, and that most solemnly, Are we living Christians? Is Christ formed within us? Are we constrained by His love, and influenced by His grace, to live no longer to ourselves, but to Him? Have we ever drawn nigh to God; and are we living a life of faith on Him?

Oh, see that your worship, your prayers, your hearing of the gospel, your reception of Christ's ordinances, are having a real effect upon you, and are working the work of God within you.

When the Jewish Lawgiver came down from the Mount, there was a holy radiance on his person, for he had been in company with God. And when the Disciples had been holding communion with their Lord, it was clear to the world that His blessed influence was upon them. Men 'took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.' And so our approaches to God in Public Worship, and especially when it is enriched by the Holy Supper of the Lord, should have a marked effect upon us, an abiding influence on our everyday life. It should be a great help to us on our heavenward journey, a satisfying well, as we pass through the Valley of Baca on our way home to God.

And when we reach that home, and are received into the Church above, what then? How will it be with us? We shall need no ordinances, no times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; for He will be always with us—our Sun, our Shield, our Guide, our Teacher, our Portion, the boun-

teous Giver of every blessing. Then *Two*, at least, of the features which predominate in our earthly services will be no more needed. There will be no more need of *Confession*; for sin will be unknown in heaven: and there will be no more *Supplication*; for all our wants will be abundantly satisfied. But we shall still *praise* God—yea, with a heartier voice than ever; and we shall *worship*, or pay homage, to Him who has loved us, and redeemed us, saying, ‘Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.’

I cannot better close this chapter than by giving you six plain directions which I lately met with.

First, Try to understand the Prayer-book. Study it carefully, and get the right meaning and spirit of our various Services.

Secondly, Join heartily and audibly in

the Responses. Do not be afraid to speak out. The Amens in the ancient Church, we are told, 'used to sound like a clap of thunder.'

Thirdly, Take your Bible with you to church ; follow the reading of the Lessons ; and look out the text of the Sermon.

Fourthly, Take a warm and hearty part in the Singing. If you have a good voice, use it to the glory of God.

Fifthly, Go to the house of God in a spirit of prayer. Go in a teachable frame of mind, anxious to appear before God. Go with all your sins, and all your troubles, and leave them at the feet of Jesus. Seek to know Him, and to love Him, as the Refuge of your soul.

Sixthly, Be careful lest the devil should pluck the good seed out of your heart before you get home. Think over, talk over, and above all pray over, what you have heard.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF MEETNESS FOR GOD'S
KINGDOM.

To belong to God's Kingdom here on earth, and to have part in that future Kingdom which is eternal, requires indeed a peculiar meetness. Let us apply the Gospel Touchstone, and test it, so that there shall be no mistake.

The Religion of Christ, or His present Kingdom, does not consist in mere ordinances ; and yet it has much to do with *them*. Every Institution is bound together by certain outward ties, and is regulated by external laws. All these however may be strictly observed ; and yet the *great object* of the Institution may entirely fail.

An Army, for instance, has its proper

organization. Each Regiment has its distinctive uniform ; and each Soldier is bound to conform to the special regulations, and submit to the special discipline, of his corps. These are all important for the well-being and efficiency of an Army ; and yet they are not everything : for boldness, and courage, and skill are also needed, or that Army will win no battles.

And so it is with the Church of Christ. Every Church has its own forms, and rules, and ordinances ; and if we are true members we shall obey them, feeling that they are a great help and benefit to us. For example, the Church summons her children to Morning and Evening Prayer. Many come, and perhaps are none the better. It is an empty form to them, which they go through, and to very little purpose ; and yet to others it is blest—unspeakably blest.

Again, the Church bids her members to observe certain appointed Days and Seasons. She bids them to humble them-

selves in Lent, and to call up all their joy at Christmas and Easter. Now, these are not useless observances — far from it. They may greatly conduce to our spiritual growth and well-being. But religion does not consist in the most exact and punctual practice of them. There is something inner, deeper, and more vital. They are helpful to the growth of our inward life; but they are not the life itself. They are as the scaffolding, which assists us in the erection of the building, but they are not the building itself. They are as the blade, and the stalk which sustains the corn, but they are not the corn itself.

With regard then to the externals of the Church, we should remember that they may conduce to our religious life, but they are not religion itself. Certain Doctrines and Ceremonies may commend themselves to one Christian, but not to another. ‘All things (says the Apostle) are lawful, but not expedient’—expedient perhaps for one, *but not* for another. We should bear in

mind, that after all 'the kingdom of God is not meat and drink : ' it does not consist in attention to Outward Forms, but in something of far greater importance, namely, 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' In other words, it consists in that holiness of heart and life which marks God's true people, with its accompaniments of peace and joy within. Such is the portion of those who have not only been received into membership with Christ in Baptism, but have by faith realized their high position as His disciples.

But as regards the future, our meetness for God's presence is described in various ways. I can hardly however do better than take the graphic description which our Lord Himself gives in His Parable of the Marriage Supper. He there speaks of a certain 'Wedding Garment,' which was required of every guest who was permitted to take part in that Heavenly Feast.

Now what was that meetness described by being clad in the Wedding Garment?

Some consider it to mean *Personal Holiness*; and others, *the Righteousness and merit of Christ*. Here is a little difficulty; but it is not one that need seriously trouble us, so long as we are content and take a simple, childlike view of our Lord's teaching.

Jesus describes a certain King who had made a Feast. He sends out his usual invitations to the guests. But they, many of them, refuse to come, pleading one excuse and another for their refusal. He then sends his messengers in another direction, bidding those to his banquet who had hitherto been passed by.

Presently the supper-room being filled, he goes in to take a view of those who were gathered; and among them he discovers one clothed in an unsuitable dress, unlike the rest, and without the wedding garment, which was required of all. This person had evidently mingled with the assembled throng, and had hoped to pass unnoticed.

With regard to this *Wedding Garment*, it may be observed that in the East long white robes were usually worn at public festivals; and those who appeared on such occasions with any other garments were excluded. There is a passage in the Old Testament, to which our Lord seems here to allude. It is in Zeph. i. 7, 8. The Prophet there says, 'The Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.' The Person who invited the guests prepared such a garment for each to be worn on the occasion. These garments, called Caftans, were ready in the house, and were given out by the ruler of the feast to all who applied for them. To refuse then to wear such a dress, would be deemed an insult; and therefore the conduct of the person mentioned was inexcusable.

The object of the Parable is clear. It

reminds us that the Lord has provided a great blessing for His people ; but for admission to the enjoyment of this blessing something more than a mere outward profession was required—a certain fitness, which is here represented by the ‘Wedding Garment.’

And what is that fitness? Certainly nothing of our own; for there is no clothing which we possess, that can make us worthy of such a privilege—no clothing, which will serve to fit us for the courts of heaven—no clothing of our own texture, which can bear the scrutiny of Him ‘who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.’

There are *four* things which we need, each one of us; and without these we can never be admitted into heaven. We may pass muster in the Church below, but we can have no place in the Church above.

First, we need *Forgiveness*, the complete blotting out of past and present sin, the payment of every debt which can be charged against us. We cannot for a

moment imagine the possibility of a single unforgiven one sitting down to 'the marriage supper' in heaven. He would be a black sheep in the midst of that spotless flock, a conscience-stricken and uneasy member of that peaceful, happy throng. The existence of even one unpardoned sin is enough to mar our happiness here, and would be fatal to our bliss hereafter. Surely, if we desire to be at peace with God, and to live a happy life, there must be no cloud intervening between Him and us. Our first step then must be to obtain *forgiveness*; and this can only be through the atonement made upon the Cross, and purchased for us by the Son of God; 'in whom (as the Apostle says) we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace'

What a blessing it would be if we could, all of us, realise this priceless boon—if we could take to ourselves those words of mercy, 'Thy sins be forgiven

thee ; go in peace.' There would be a weight off our minds, and an unspeakable relief to our souls. Go, dear reader, and tell God in how many ways you have offended Him. Tell Him that sin makes you unhappy. Kneel down and mention to Him every sin that distresses you ; and entreat Him to look upon you in mercy, and wash away your guilt. Let your language be that of the Psalmist, ' Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.' Oh, beseech Him to remove the heavy burden from your soul, and make you to feel the blessedness of the man ' whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.'

But we further need *Acceptance with God*. To be forgiven is an unspeakable blessing, but something more is required for our complete happiness. An offending slave may be forgiven, but he will still remain at a distance from his master. He will still look up to him with fear, and his *life* will be one of drudgery. But to be

admitted into God's friendship — to be adopted as His child—to be brought into a state of reconciliation with Him—this is happiness indeed, a happiness too which you and I may enjoy. Whether the world prospers with us, or not ; whether it smiles upon us, or frowns ; whether earthly joy or sorrow be our portion ; all is well, if we can but feel that God is our God, and that we are His children.

I lately received a letter from a person, a very true Christian, who had just undergone one of the most painful operations possible. For six long days and nights he was in perfect agony, his bodily suffering being such that he was unable to speak, or think, or pray. All he could do was to endeavour quietly and submissively to endure the trial he was passing through. And yet he was kept in peace ; for he felt that he was accepted through God's mercy, and that the Saviour who loved him, and gave Himself for him, was very near to him. There was something real in this.

and something which repaid him for all that he endured.

And why have not we the same peace? Why is it that any of us remain at a distance from God, when we may be so near to Him? Why is He a stranger to us, when He offers Himself to us as our Father and our Friend? His arms are at this moment stretched out to receive us, and it is only our unbelief that keeps us from His bosom. 'Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.'

But the true believer is indebted to his Saviour for yet another and a higher blessing. Not only did Christ stand in the sinner's place when He died upon the Cross, paying every debt for us at the cost of His own blood—not only did He procure pardon for us, and open a way for our acceptance—but He made over to us His very *Righteousness*, handing over as it were His merits, and placing them to our account. Thus St. Paul says, 'He was

made *sin* for us, that we might be made the *righteousness* of God in him ;' and again he says, 'As by one man's disobedience (by Adam's disobedience) many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (by the obedience of Christ) many are made righteous.' And this truth is repeated in one of our Articles (the eleventh), which says, 'We are accounted righteous (not only forgiven, but actually accounted righteous) before God only from the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our works or deservings.'

Here is a blessed exchange. Our unrighteousness is put away for the Saviour's sake, and His righteousness is imputed to us, or reckoned as ours. Such is the glorious privilege to which every true child of God is admitted !

But the saving grace, which our Lord has by His merits procured for us, does not exclude us from the part which *we* are to take in the work of our salvation. It is

true that, if we are saved, it is God's work from first to last. If we obtain eternal life, it is His gift. But then there is a great and important work to be accomplished in our own souls ; not only a work to be done for us, but also within us. The two beautifully blend and harmonise together. When the sinner obtains pardon and acceptance in Christ, and a better righteousness than his own in which to appear before God, he experiences at the same time such a change within as fits him for God's service here and God's presence hereafter. He becomes a changed man, a new creature, a hater of sin, and a lover of holiness. And now it is his one great desire to grow up into God's likeness, to walk in that narrow path which He has marked out, to do His will, and to adorn the doctrine of his Saviour in all things. And if, as I said just now, we cannot for a moment conceive the possibility of an *unforgiven* one in heaven, neither can we imagine it to be possible for an *unholy* one

to be there. No, there must be a holiness of heart and character, or we cannot be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Now then I think we are prepared to give an answer to the question, What is 'the Marriage Garment,' in which the heavenly Guest must be clad? It is not *pardon* only; it is not *acceptance* only; it is not the *imputed righteousness* of Christ only; neither is it *personal holiness* alone; but all combined. These, these together, are the wedding dress, the complete attire, in which we must appear before God. Without it, we may be among the many called, but not among the few chosen. Without it, we may have our standing within the precincts of the outer fold, but never enter its sacred enclosure; we may be members of the Church on earth, but form no part of 'the general assembly and Church of the firstborn which are written in heaven.'

And now I will ask you to pause for a moment before the subject is dismissed, and this last chapter closed. The great King has sent out His message of loving invitation to all classes among us. There are some in the world, whom this invitation has not yet reached: they have never heard of Christ, or of the Feast which He has prepared. Others have heard it; but have deliberately rejected it. How is it with you? Your ears have been gladdened with the joyful sound: has your soul been gladdened by its reception? Christ's Messengers have come to you, offering you salvation. Have you thankfully and cordially accepted it? Perhaps you have treated the Messenger with kindness; but have put by, for a time at least, the reception of the message.

Oh, hesitate no longer. If Christ may be yours; if Salvation may be yours; if the Wedding Garment is all ready for you; then decide today, and put in your claim *for them*. Apply for pardon, a present

pardon. Give yourself to Christ, who is ready to receive you. Lay yourself out for a holy, useful, and happy life. Live no longer to yourself, but to God. Ask Him to give you His Holy Spirit to dwell within you, and to conform your life and character to His most blessed image, that you may become holy as He is holy. Whatever you know to be wrong, and whatever hinders you in your Christian course, put it away at once, and declare plainly that you seek a better country, even an heavenly.

Or if you are already His, try to walk more closely with Him. Try to live a yet higher Christian life. Live more by faith, and less by sight. Live for heaven. So long as you are here, seek to be useful, and whilst blest yourself, to be made a blessing to others.

If then I were to draw the portrait of one meet for God's heavenly kingdom, I should describe him as a soldier having on 'the whole armour of God,' or as a guest

clad in 'the wedding garment'—as a pardoned sinner—an adopted and accepted son—as one accounted righteous for the Saviour's sake, and actually righteous through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit—waiting for, and ready for, the summons of his Lord; 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.'

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